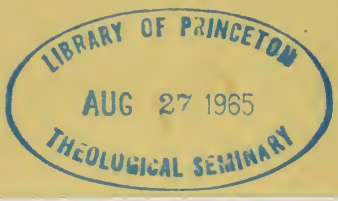
UNITED PRESBYTERIANISM

William J. Reid



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UNITED PRESBYTERIANISM.

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(SECOND EDITION.)

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Preface.

ONE of the duties of a pastor is to train the young to be consistent members of the visible church. To do this, he must instruct them as to the nature of faith, the necessity of a public confession, and the doctrines of the church. This instruction can be given, in part, in the formal preaching of the gospel, but something more seems to be necessary. He must gather them in classes; he must talk with them in private; he must direct their reading. The author has long felt the need of some book, which he could put into the hands of the young as a part of this training; but finding nothing which met his ideas, he has prepared the following chapters. He would hope that other pastors may find the volume helpful in their work.

The volume does not profess to be an exhaustive discussion of the subjects treated. It was not intended for advanced students in theology, but for those who are inquiring about the first steps in duty. Its aim is to instruct, in plain and simple language, those who are just beginning the Christian life.

To the young, into whose hands this volume may fall, it is affectionately commended. It was written especially for you, by one who has not forgotten the experiences of his own youth, and who deeply sympathizes with you in your longings and questionings after the truth. If it proves of any use in guiding your investigations, and in answering your questions as to present duty, its design will be accomplished.

The author would dedicate the volume to the members of his own Bible class, whose questions and answers have suggested many of the thoughts which have been presented and discussed. Your interest and progress in Bible study have given you a warm place in your teacher's affections. He rejoices that the most of you are "walking in the truth," and he hopes and prays that all will be made "wise unto salvation." The time we spend together on the Sabbath afternoon is one of the pleasantest hours of the week. May this little book be to you a memento of past intercourse, a token of increasing friendship and a help to a closer walk with God!

Your friend, teacher and pastor,

WILLIAM J. REID.

PITTSBURGH, PA., *June* 21, 1881.

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UNITED PRESBYTERIANISM.

CHAPTER I.

FAITH.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.—*Acts* xvi. 31.

NO one can ask a more important question than this: "What must I do to be saved?" On its answer depends our present and future happiness. We know that we are sinners. The evidence of sin without us and within us is too manifest to be denied. We know that sin is rebellion against God, and that the justice of God will not suffer it to go unpunished. We know that "it is not all of death to die," that the soul is immortal, and that there is a life beyond the grave. We are sure that there is a heaven into which sin and sorrow can never enter, and a world of woe from which holiness, peace, and joy are forever banished. How can we escape this world of woe? How

can we reach the heavenly home? How can we be delivered from the guilt, pollution, and punishment of sin? How can we become heirs of eternal life? Or, to sum up all these questions in one, What must we do to be saved? This is a question which human wisdom cannot answer. Man, if left to himself, could never discover the way to heaven. But the word of God answers the question, and reveals the way of salvation so plainly, that "the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein." That revelation is briefly comprehended in the words, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." As faith is so inseparably connected with salvation, it deserves our attention and study. In the present chapter, we will discuss the nature of faith, the means we must employ in order to become believers, and the reasons why we should believe.

THE NATURE OF FAITH.

1. We must get *a clear definition of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ* firmly fixed in our minds. Faith is often spoken of in the word of God, and it is from this word that we must learn what faith is. It would be useless to attempt to repeat the inspired passages, which describe the duty, importance, necessity, evidence, and rewards of faith; to do this would be to

transcribe the most of the Bible. John says, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." Paul says, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Jesus says, "He that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." These passages are but a specimen of the teaching of the Scriptures. Is it possible to gather up this teaching and express it in a brief definition? Many attempts have been made. One of the most successful is the one found in our Shorter Catechism, "Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation, as he is offered to us in the gospel." We believe that this is a correct statement of what the Bible teaches with regard to faith. From this definition, which is easily remembered, we can learn much of the nature of faith.

2. *The object of faith* is the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith, in general, is an assent to truth upon testimony. Religious faith is an assent to divine truth on divine testimony. Therefore, the general object of religious faith is the whole word of God. We are to believe all the revelations of Scripture, not on the testimony of any man, or of the church, or because they commend

themselves to our reason, but on the authority of God himself. But this is not the faith under discussion. The special and personal object of saving faith is the Lord Jesus Christ. Hence, this faith is called "the faith of Jesus Christ," and "faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ." It consists in believing the testimony of God concerning his Son. This divine testimony is summed up in the words, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." We are to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that he took upon himself our nature, that he suffered and died in our room, that he was raised from the dead on the third day, that he ascended into heaven, where he ever liveth to make intercession for us, and that he is our prophet, priest, and king. In one word, we are to believe all that God has told us concerning his Son in the gospel.

3. *The principal acts of saving faith* are receiving and resting upon Christ. Faith is always the belief in testimony, but it must correspond with the testimony believed. If the gospel was a mere statement of truths, or a record of facts, the assent of the mind to these truths, and the crediting of these facts, would constitute the faith of the gospel. But the gospel is something more than a statement of facts and doctrines

respecting the Saviour. It contains a free offer of Christ and salvation through him to sinners of every class. Therefore, that saving faith may correspond with the testimony to be believed, it must include the acceptance of Christ, as offered to us in the gospel.

Faith is described by many different words, because Christ is represented and offered under various figures. Christ is the ark of safety, and we are to *enter* into him; he is the city of refuge, and we are to *flee* to him; he is lifted up, as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, and we are to *look* unto him; he is the bread and water of life, and we are to *eat* his flesh and *drink* his blood; he is the robe of righteousness, and we are to *put on* Christ to cover our nakedness; he is the gift of God, and we are to *receive* him; he is the only sure foundation, and we are to *rest* on him. The last two figures are the ones referred to in the definition of the Shorter Catechism: "Whereby we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation." It is to be observed that these terms do not denote different acts of faith—they are only different expressions for the same act.

These figurative expressions make it evident that saving faith is something more than an assent of the mind to the facts and doctrines of the gospel; it is an

accepting of Christ and a relying on him as the Saviour. This acceptance of Christ does not come from any knowledge of God's purposes respecting our individual salvation, or from the possession of any good qualities which distinguish us from others; it proceeds solely from the free offer of salvation to the chief of sinners. We accept Christ, because he is offered, and as he is offered. Herein is the difference between the faith of true disciples and that of devils; for devils have faith. We are told that "the devils also believe and tremble." They believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and that he suffered and died in the room of sinners; they believe all the teaching of the gospel concerning Jesus; but they cannot believe that he is their Saviour, because he is not offered to them. We may accept him as our Saviour, because he is offered to us. It is this offer of Christ which gives us the right to receive and rest upon him for salvation.

THE MEANS WE MUST EMPLOY IN ORDER TO HAVE FAITH IN CHRIST.

1. *The author of saving faith* is God. In our definition of faith, it is said to be "a saving *grace*." It is so called, because it is freely given to us by God. The Scriptures are plain on this point. Faith is declared to be "the gift of God," "the operation of God." The

Holy Ghost is called "the Spirit of faith," and faith is mentioned among "the fruits of the Spirit," because it is wrought in the hearts of men by the Spirit, as the applier of the redemption purchased by Christ. But some one may say, "If faith is the gift of God, I have nothing to do; if God gives me faith, it will be well; if he does not, I am helpless." This is a perversion of the doctrine of grace. Though faith is the gift of God, it is given through the use of appointed means. If these means are rightly used, faith is bestowed; if they are not rightly used, the case is hopeless. The whole history of the church proves the truth of the assertion, that every one who has properly used the appointed means has been saved. What, then, are the means we must employ in order to have that faith in Christ, which is the gift of God?

2. Faith is usually wrought in the heart by *the word.* "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." As faith is an assent to testimony, men must know what that testimony is before they can believe. As saving faith is an assent to God's testimony concerning Christ, and an acceptance of Christ as he is offered in the gospel, we must know who Christ is, what he has done, and how he is offered, before we can have saving faith. This knowledge is reached only through the word. The Scriptures alone

tell us of the person, work and offer of Christ. Therefore, it is evident that if a man would know of Christ, he must go to the inspired word. A knowledge of the Scriptures, like knowledge of every other kind, can be acquired only through the use of means. We are to read them with diligence, to treasure them up in our memories, and to use all our powers and all the helps within our reach to understand them. Prominent among these helps are commentaries and religious books. There is danger, in these days of many books, that the Bible may be neglected or forgotten, but if we would reach the true knowledge of Christ, and that faith which comes through knowledge, we must make it our chief study. We must also attend on the preaching of the word, for "it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." In all the ages of the church, the voice of the living teacher has been a powerful instrument in making men acquainted with the truth, and in moving them to obedience.

The conclusion from all this is obvious. If we would have saving faith, we must study the Bible diligently, and listen attentively and regularly to the preaching of the word. Those who do not read the Scriptures, who absent themselves from church, or who pay no heed when they are present in the place of

preaching, have no reason to believe that they will ever receive and rest upon Christ, as he is offered in the gospel. "How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" On the other hand, those who read and hear the word of God, as it ought to be read and heard, have a right to expect that their reading and hearing will result in saving faith. It certainly is true that God is the author of faith, but he ordinarily works through the means of the word. When Lydia heard the preaching of Paul, "the Lord opened her heart." The apostle tells us how his preaching became a blessing to those who heard him: "Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost." To this day, those who attend aright upon the ordinance of the word, both read and preached, may expect that the Spirit will bless it to their salvation, and that the Lord will open their hearts to understand and believe.

3. *Serious meditation* is another means which ought to be employed, and which God has often blessed. Such meditation is necessary in order to fix the truths of revelation on our memory. "Therefore, we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip." The world has so many labors, cares and pleasures,

which are pressing upon our attention, that we must put forth no little effort, or the word, read and preached, will be "as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again." Meditation is also necessary that we may make a profitable use of the providences which visit us and our fellows. God instructs men by his providences as well as by his word, but the accidents, sicknesses and bereavements, which befall us and others, will have no good effect on us, unless they are attended and followed by serious thought. It is too often the case that we try to blot out the impression, which some passage of the word or some startling providence has made upon our minds. The Bible describes in terrible words the guilt, pollution and punishment of sin, and these descriptions fill us with apprehensions. Death overtakes one of our friends, and we are reminded that we must die and stand before the judgment seat. We try to banish the thoughts suggested by these things, by engaging in worldly pleasures, by mingling with gay companions, by devoting ourselves to business, by reading light literature, or in some other way. And sometimes we succeed in removing all serious impressions. This ought not to be. Serious meditation on the word and the events of providence should be cherished and improved as a means of grace. Many a man has been

led, in this way, to accept the Saviour. He who strives with all his might to drive away serious thought will not likely attain to saving faith. He who meditates much on the revelations of God, as made in inspiration and providence, is using one means, which the Spirit has often blessed to the salvation of the soul.

4. Among the other means of grace, *prayer* should not be forgotten. He who gives good heed to the word of God, and who engages much in serious meditation, will be drawn to the throne of grace. If we learn, from the Scriptures, our sinfulness and helplessness, and the love of God as manifested in the gift of his Son, we will often pray. That man, who is thus brought to his knees, is not far from the kingdom of God. "Behold, he believeth," follows hard after, "Behold, he prayeth."

Nothing need be said, in this connection, of man's natural inability. The Saviour's words are unquestionably true: "No man can come to me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him." Nevertheless, it is true, that every one in a Christian land can read the word, listen to its preaching, cherish serious thought, and pray to God; and the history of the church warrants the assertion that those, who make a right use of these things, will inherit eternal life.

Though God is the author of faith, every man can use the means which God has uniformly blessed. Jesus spake as never man spake when he said, "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life." Therefore, if we do not have saving faith, we are ourselves to blame.

SOME REASONS WHY WE SHOULD BELIEVE.

1. One reason why we should accept Christ as our Saviour is because this is *God's command.* It is God who has said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved;" "This is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment." Too many regard the words, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," as an invitation which they are at liberty either to accept or reject. It is to be remembered that they are a positive commandment, binding on every one to whom the gospel is preached. The same God who says, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," "Thou shalt not kill," "Thou shalt not steal," says also, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." Nor does this positive command refer to some indefinite time in the future. We are commanded to believe *now.* "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." "Remember now thy Creator in the

days of thy youth." Those who say, as many do, that they will believe at some future time, are claiming to be wiser than God. It is as if they said, "It is true, God commands us to seek his kingdom first, but we know better; we should first seek education, wealth, or pleasure; after that it will be time enough to seek the kingdom. It is true, God has commanded us to remember him in the days of our youth, but we know better; old age is a more favorable time." If this is true, those who do not believe in Christ are guilty, not only of disobedience, but also of blasphemy. God's command is the supreme reason for present faith. You know that there is a God, that he is a God of power and justice, and that his commands cannot be disobeyed with impunity. Therefore, believe, and believe *now.*

2. Another reason why we should believe in Christ is because *salvation is inseparably connected with faith.* "He that believeth shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned." It is true, faith does not save us; we are saved by Christ: but faith is the appointed prerequisite to salvation. This may be illustrated by the miracles which Jesus wrought when he was on earth. The blind men, who came to him to be healed, had faith in his power. Still, it was his power, and not their faith, that healed them; their faith only

brought them into a place in which his healing power was exercised. So faith does not save the soul, but it brings the soul into a position to be saved. Faith seems a small thing, but on it eternal life depends. It is only the bucket, let down into the well of God's grace; but without it we cannot drink and live. It is a purse of cheapest and coarsest material, but it holds that which gives "the true riches." Many have entered heaven, but not an unbeliever is found in their number; many have gone down into the world of the lost, but no believer is there. It needs no prophetic insight into the future to say that, if you are saved, you will have faith, and that, if you are lost, it will be because you have no faith. Is not salvation to be desired? Though we do not yet fully know in what the future glory consists, we know enough to awaken the greatest expectations. Heaven is the home which God has prepared for his people; and that which God has prepared must be perfect. In heaven all the desires of the immortal soul will be satisfied. This divine home of complete satisfaction can be reached only through faith. If you would ever enter its gates and be a partaker of its joys, you must believe.

3. Another reason why we should at once believe in Christ is because *the time is short.* Death will come, and "then shall the dust return to the earth as it was;

and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it." The dying believer immediately passes into Paradise; the dying unbeliever is straightway in "torment." If we do not accept Christ as our Saviour in this life, there is no hope, for we will have no opportunity to accept him in the life to come. And death may come at any moment. We carry about in our bodies the seeds of dissolution, which may ripen at any hour of the day or night. As we may die at any time, it is the part of wisdom to do now that which ought to be done before death. It will not do to defer this important matter of faith till our dying hours, for death may come without warning, or we may be rendered unconscious through the power of disease. Even if there is warning and consciousness, we will have enough to do in that hour without having to make our peace with God. If we cannot conquer our doubts and fears when we are in the full vigor of health, how can we expect to conquer them in the gathering weakness of the last moments of life? "If in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" It is not safe to put off the duty of faith, even if we were sure that we would live many years. The great majority of those who are converted are converted in youth. When youth has passed, every year lessens the probability of

conversion. If we are not led to love God while the heart is tender, it is not likely that we will ever love him. Therefore, believe, and believe *now*.

These are some of the prominent reasons why we should at once believe in Christ. Oh! that the Spirit would bring them with such power to our souls that each one of us would say, "I receive and rest upon Christ alone for salvation, as he is offered in the gospel."

CHAPTER II.

CONFESSION OF FAITH.

With the mouth confession is made unto salvation.—*Rom.* x. 10.

FAITH is man's great duty. The only answer which the word of God permits us to make to the question, "What must I do to be saved?" is, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." But is this all? Reason teaches us that if there is faith in the heart, it must manifest itself in the life. The Scriptures teach the same truth. Inward belief and outward confession must go together. Jesus says, "Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father which is in heaven." John says, "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him and he in God." Paul says, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." These passages make it plain that, if we have that saving faith, in which we

receive and rest upon Christ alone for salvation, as he is offered in the gospel, we will and must confess our faith before men.

And what is confession? The word, which is translated "confess" in the passages quoted, is often rendered "profess." It properly means an expression of our agreement with something which is spoken or maintained by others. In a religious sense, confession is an expression of our agreement with what God holds and declares to be true. This confession must be a public one, for it is expressly said to be "with the mouth." A confession or profession of religion, therefore, denotes a public assent to all the declarations of God about his nature and law, about our sinfulness and need of a Saviour, about heaven and hell, about the Holy Ghost and the Lord Jesus, and about all other matters contained in his holy word. As the doctrine respecting the Redeemer is the leading doctrine of revelation, and as faith in the Redeemer is our main duty, a religious confession may be defined to be an open and public acknowledgment of our belief in Christ as he is revealed and offered to us in the gospel. Such an acknowledgment includes a profession of our belief in all the kindred truths of revelation. Bearing in mind this definition, we are ready to discuss in this chapter the relation between faith and confession, the

way in which confession should be made, and the importance of such a confession.

THE ORDER OF A CONFESSION OF FAITH.

Confession is not man's first duty, for it is manifest that he must have faith before he can confess it. A public confession is not a means of grace, in the sense in which prayer and the reading of the word are means of grace. We can exhort every one to "search the Scriptures," and to be diligent in prayer, and we can assure him that there is hope that he will be saved, if he uses these means rightly; but we cannot advise a man to make a profession of religion till he has some religion to profess. Faith must precede confession. The first duty is, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ;" the second is, "Confess that Jesus is the Son of God." This is the divinely appointed order, and it cannot be reversed. Every man must, therefore, determine whether he has faith in Christ, before he can take this second step in the path of Christian duty. Can this be determined? Can any one know whether he has saving faith? Are there evidences of faith, so plain and easily understood, that they cannot be mistaken? The word of God answers these questions in the affirmative. What are some of these evidences?

One evidence of faith is a hatred of sin. Nothing

reveals the great evil of sin so plainly as the sufferings of Golgotha. If we believe that Jesus died for our sins, we will hate them and turn from them. Of course, we cannot hope for perfect sinlessness in the present life, "For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not." While we remain in the flesh, we must expect the flesh to lust against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. Still, the man who believes in Jesus will long and struggle for deliverance, and will hate sin more and more. Do you hate sin? Do you "abhor that which is evil, cleave to that which is good?" If you do, you have one evidence of the possession of saving faith, for hatred of sin is a result of faith.

Another evidence of faith is love for God. By nature, the sinner fears God, for he knows that he is an enemy of God. He dreads every approach into the presence of God. But when he sees the love of God, as manifested in the gift of his Son, and feels that God's love is extended towards him, his fear and dread give place to love for the heavenly Father, who has done so much for him. It ought not to be difficult to discover whether we love God or not. We have no trouble in deciding whether we love an earthly friend. If we love God, we will take pleasure in thinking about him, in communing with him, and in doing that

which is pleasing in his sight. Our old thoughts of God as a tyrant will pass away, and we will think of him as our reconciled Father. Do you love God? Is your meditation of him sweet? Is it your delight to please him? If so, you have another evidence of the possession of saving faith, for love to God is a result of faith.

Another evidence of faith is love for the saints. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." This Christian affection is cherished towards all disciples, not because they are bound to us by the ties of nature or of gratitude, but simply because they are disciples. It reveals itself in kind words, helpful deeds and loving prayers. Do you have such love? If so, you have another evidence of the possession of saving faith.

Another evidence of faith is a sincere resolution and endeavor to keep the commandments of God. "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." We can learn the Lord's commandments only from the Scriptures. Those who study the Bible, and who live according to its precepts, have evidence of faith, "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."

Another evidence of faith is a consciousness of having

accepted Christ as he is offered in the gospel. Every believer ought to be able to say, "He loved me and gave himself for me." This assurance does not rest on any revelation of God's purposes concerning our election, or on the possession of any good qualities which recommend us to the favorable notice of God, but solely on the free offer of Christ to sinners. We accept him because he is offered to us, and as he is offered. Do you thus accept Christ and rely on him alone for salvation? If you do, you have faith.

By means of these and other evidences, laid down in the word, and applied to the life in careful and prayerful self-examination, every one can determine whether he has faith in Christ. If he has not faith, his duty is to believe. This is the first step, and no other is possible till this is taken. If he has faith, what is his next duty? It is to confess his faith in the way God has appointed. Just at this point many hesitate and stumble. They hope they have accepted Christ as their Saviour, but they are afraid they are not yet ready to make a profession of religion. If you hate sin, if you love God and his people, if you are sincerely trying to keep his commandments, and if you, knowing who Christ is and what he has done, intelligently accept him as he is offered, you have faith, and

it is your duty to show your faith by a public confession. How can such a confession be made?

THE MANNER OF A CONFESSION OF FAITH.

1. A confession of faith is to be made by *a union with the church.* A confession, as already defined, is a public declaration of our belief in the testimony of God concerning his Son, and of our acceptance of Christ as our Saviour. It must be a *public* declaration. The very essence of a confession "with the mouth" is making known to others the belief of our hearts. Nothing, therefore, can be called a confession which is not made publicly, in the presence of men. Nor can anything be called by this name which does not distinctly declare our faith in the Lord Jesus. Whatever else there may be in it, it must contain a profession of our acceptance of Christ as our Saviour. Anything which fulfils these two essentials may be called a confession. A man might stand at the corner of the streets with a placard hung about his neck on which was inscribed, "Christ is my Saviour;" he might publish his faith through the daily press; he might stop every man he met and tell him of his Christianity; but these are not the ways God has appointed. The way of divine appointment is by a union with the church.

A union with the church meets the essentials of a

confession. Whether it is made in the presence of the session alone, or in the presence of the session and congregation, it is a public act. It is, also, a declaration of faith in Christ, for while the man is required to profess his adherence to, and belief in the doctrines of the church with which he is uniting, the most important part of his profession is in answer to the question, "Do you profess your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, your acceptance of him as your Saviour, and your resolution, through grace, to continue in the faith?" He who makes this profession, whose name is recorded as a member of the church, and who takes his seat with the people of the Lord at the table of the Lord, says by these acts, in the presence of all men, "I am a disciple of Jesus."

Such a union with the church is the divinely appointed way of making a confession of faith. God has established a church in the world, and he has mentioned faith in his Son as the distinguishing characteristic of the true members of the church. Hence, it is evident, that the church is designed for believers. God declares that his people are "not of the world;" he calls them "his peculiar people;" he commands them to be "separate," and the line of separation is the line which divides the church from the world. In connection with all this, the Saviour's repeated words concerning confessing him before men, and

being ashamed of him before men, point plainly to a union with the church. The design of the church, the characteristics of its members, the commands of God and the invitations of the gospel prove, beyond question, that such a union with the church is the divinely appointed way of making a public confession of faith.

A union with the church is a natural expression of faith. If a man believes that Christ has saved his soul, he will love Christ; and where there is love, there will be an earnest desire to keep the Saviour's commandments. One prominent command is, "Do this in remembrance of me." But before we can commemorate the Saviour's death by partaking of the emblems of his broken body and shed blood, we must make a profession of his name by a union with his church. Can it be possible that any one, who has love for the Redeemer, will knowingly and persistently refuse to obey any of his commandments, especially his dying request for remembrance? Humanly speaking, we might forget or disobey any other command, but to forget or disobey the command spoken by Jesus, when he was about to drink to the very dregs the wine of God's wrath prepared for us, would be beyond the baseness of ingratitude. Besides this, if there is a true love for the Saviour, there will be an earnest desire to

extend his kingdom and promote his glory. Can this be done by remaining openly on the side of Satan? by using our example and influence in the service of the great enemy of souls? It is impossible. If we would fight the good fight of faith and assist the Captain of our salvation in his holy warfare against the adversary, we must number ourselves with his followers, and put on his uniform and armor.

As a union with the church is a matter of divine appointment, and a natural expression of faith in Christ, it may be said, without fear of contradiction, that in ordinary circumstances the visible church is the only door through which we can enter the church invisible. We must enlist in the church militant, and we must serve the time of our enlistment, whether it is long or short, or we cannot expect to have our names enrolled among the members of the church triumphant. Of course, there are extraordinary circumstances, of rare occurrence, in which a union with the church is impossible; but in all ordinary cases, union with the church must precede entrance into glory. Those who confess Christ before men in the appointed way are the only ones who have the right to expect that he will confess them before his Father, who is in heaven.

The conclusion from all this is obvious. If you have scriptural evidence that you have accepted Christ

as your Saviour, it is your duty to confess your faith by a union with the church. Your faith may as yet be weak, but you cannot strengthen it by neglecting a plain duty. You may feel your unworthiness and sinfulness, but greater holiness can be reached only through sincere endeavor to keep God's commandments. Delay can be of no advantage; it but hinders the blessing. Every man's first duty is to believe in Christ. When this duty has been performed, he is to show his faith by a union with the church.

2. A confession of faith is to be made by *a holy and consistent life.* Some seem to think that their whole duty is performed, when they have united with the church and taken a seat at the communion table. They regard their confession as then ended, and they flatter themselves that all they have to do is to wait till Christ acknowledges them in glory. But this is a serious error. Union with the church is only one step; many others must be taken before the end of the Christian journey is reached. These many other steps are briefly described in the words, *a holy and consistent life.* Such a life is the outgrowth and evidence of true faith in Christ, and real membership in the church.

What is it to live a holy life? It is to imitate Christ's example, for he has left us an example that we should follow in his steps. He went about doing

good, he healed the sick, he comforted the sorrowing, he preached the gospel to the poor, he lived for our fallen race, he was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners." We are to strive to be like him. If we would know how we should conduct ourselves at any time or in any place, we should ask and answer in the light of revelation this question: "What would Jesus have said, what would he have done in such circumstances as these?" To live a holy life is to keep Christ's commandments. He has left us, not only an example to be imitated, but also commandments to be obeyed. These commandments are plain and complete. He who is familiar with the Saviour's instructions will not often be at a loss to know what his duty is. An earnest striving after perfect obedience is good evidence of the reality of our faith and the sincerity of our profession. Owing to our weakness and depravity of heart, we will sometimes transgress. Because a man now and then falls into sin, it is not conclusive evidence that he is a child of wrath; but no one can claim to be holy who refuses to obey the known commandments of God. To confess Christ and to disobey him is a contradiction in terms. To live a holy life is to submit to Christ's will. He is the Lord of providence as well as God of revelation. He sends or permits the disappointments, sorrows and trials, which so

often visit the homes and hearts of men; and it is as much our duty to submit patiently to these dispensations of Providence as it is to obey the commands of the decalogue.

Those who strive to imitate Christ's example, to keep his commandments, and to submit to his will, are living a holy life. Our imitation, obedience and submission may be, and must be, imperfect, but every one who honestly tries for these graces is confessing Christ. It is to be observed, that a union with the church and an endeavor to live a holy life must go together. Neither is sufficient in itself. If we unite with the church and try, with watchfulness and prayer, to live a holy life, we are confessing Christ before men, as he has commanded us to do, and we have a right to expect his blessing.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A CONFESSION OF FAITH.

1. A public profession of faith is *a safeguard against temptation.* It does not prevent temptations, but it helps to resist them. A man who has taken the vows of church membership, and who knows that the eyes of the church and the world are upon him, finds it easier to do the right and abstain from the wrong. A sense of honor puts him on his guard. When he is tempted to go where he should not go, to do what he

should not do, or to say what he should not say, the remembrance of his solemn profession will check the sinful step, deed, or word. He can say to every tempter, "From henceforth let no man trouble me; for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus."

2. A public profession is *a help to faithfulness.* We have many difficult duties to perform, and owing to our weakness we need help in this direction. The great inspiration to faithfulness is the love of Christ and the reward he has promised to the faithful; but the assistance which comes from a confession of faith should not be overlooked. Every man who has taken the vows of God upon him, and who has any proper sense of the obligation of these vows, will be diligent in reading and hearing the word, in prayer and self-examination, in laboring for his own sanctification and the sanctification of others, in consecrating himself and his possessions to the service of God, and in every other good word and work. When he grows careless in duty, the remembrance of his public profession will spur him to renewed diligence. His language will ever be that of the Psalmist, "Thy vows are upon me, O God; I will render praise unto thee."

3. A public profession is necessary in order *to exert a good influence upon others.* It should be the aim of every man to lead his fellows to holiness, usefulness,

and happiness. This end can be reached only by bringing them to Christ. We are the keepers of our brethren, whether we realize it or not. We are continually exerting an influence on them, either for good or evil. If our influence would be for good, we must not only give them counsel, we must also set them an example. What influence can one have for good who is openly on the side of evil? What success can a man have in bringing men to Christ who refuses to acknowledge Christ as his Lord? Eloquent preaching will avail little without a holy life behind it. Earnest entreaties are in vain where there is not a consistent profession to give them emphasis. No one can hope for any measure of Paul's success, unless he can say, with something of Paul's sincerity, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ."

4. A public confession of faith is *a commanded duty.* That which God has commanded must be important. Has he commanded a profession of religion? Every one who is familiar with the teachings of the Bible knows he has. Because this is a commanded duty, we neglect it at our peril.

It is true, faith is the appointed prerequisite to salvation, but it is not, in ordinary cases, the only one. If we would be shielded against temptation, assisted in duty, useful to others, and obedient to God, we

must make a profession of our faith. He who has said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," has also said, "Confess before men." The Bible makes a profession of religion as indispensable to salvation as believing. If, then, you have scriptural evidence that you believe in Christ, it is your present duty to confess him before men, for it is written, "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

CHAPTER III.

THE CHURCH.

Despise ye the church of God?—1 *Cor.* xi. 22.

THE divinely appointed way of making a confession of faith in Christ is by a union with the church. Before one can do this intelligently, he must know what the church is. To the consideration of this point we turn our attention in the present chapter. What is the church? The answer to this question must be sought in the word of God. We may learn something of what the church is by studying its workings and observing its members; but if we would know what it was designed to be, and what it ought to be, we must go to the revelation of him who established it in the world. When we turn to our Bibles, one of the first things which arrests our attention is, that the word is used in a variety of senses.

THE DIFFERENT MEANINGS OF THE WORD.

The word "church" does not occur in our translation of the Old Testament Scriptures. Still, it is evi-

dent that there was a church before the incarnation. The Jewish church is called "Israel," "Jerusalem," "Zion." Every careful reader of the Bible knows that the glorious things spoken of Zion and Jerusalem in the prophets and the Psalms have reference to the church of God. In our translation of the New Testament, the word is found no less than one hundred and ten times, but it does not always have the same meaning. The writers of the New Testament never use it, as we so often do, to describe the house in which Christians meet for the worship of God, although it very early received this meaning.

In the New Testament, the church sometimes denotes a single godly family, or a few individuals associated together in observing the institutions of the gospel. "Greet the church that is in the house of Aquila and Priscilla." "Salute the church which is in the house of Nymphas." It is likely that these churches consisted of the children and servants of the persons named, and of a few neighbors and friends, who, having professed the faith, met at their houses at stated times to hear the word and to unite in prayer and praise. We have reason to believe that the early Christians conducted their worship, for the most part, in their homes. They were poor and unable to build churches, and large gatherings in public places would attract attention and excite persecution.

The church sometimes signifies all the Christians in a particular city, whether they assembled for worship in one place or in several places. Such expressions as these are not uncommon in the New Testament: "The church at Antioch," "the church in Jerusalem," "the church in Ephesus." It is hardly to be supposed that in such large cities, where the apostles had labored for years, and where "much people" had been added to the Lord, all the professed disciples of Jesus could meet in one place for worship. We must, therefore, conclude that all the Christian families and congregations of the same city are sometimes called the church. We also read of the churches of Judea, the churches of Galatia, the churches of Macedonia, the churches of Asia. In such phrases, the term describes all the professing Christians in the same country or province.

The church sometimes signifies all the disciples of Christ throughout the world. "The church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood;" "Christ loved the church and gave himself for it;" "The church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." In these passages, and in many other similar ones, the term includes all, in every country and in every age, who acknowledge Jesus Christ as their Lord.

This universal church is sometimes spoken of as the

church militant and the church triumphant. The former comprehends those who are engaged in spiritual warfare on earth, wrestling against principalities and powers, struggling with the temptations of the world, the flesh and the devil, and in some cases resisting even unto death. The latter is made up of the glorified saints, who have overcome by the blood of the Lamb, and obtained the crown of life which fadeth not away. But they both constitute one church, subject to the same head, animated by the same spirit, interested in the same things and engaged in the same worship.

Another distinction must be made. There is a church visible and a church invisible. The Westminster Confession of Faith thus defines the invisible church: "The catholic or universal church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one under Christ, the head thereof." Of this church the Apostle speaks: "Christ loved the church and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." Some of the members of this church have finished their course and entered into heaven; some are still on earth; others have not

yet been born. They will not be brought into one place till the end comes; and then they will constitute "the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven." This is the true church in which God dwells, for which Christ died, and to which the promises are made. "Not one of them is lost." It is said to be invisible, because it cannot be discovered by the eye. That part of it, which is in heaven, is beyond the reach of human knowledge. So far as it exists on earth, it lies hidden in the visible church, from which it cannot be certainly distinguished. The qualifications of its members are internal; their faith and love are not objects of sense. If we try to separate the two, we are liable to err, and we may suppose saints to be hypocrites and hypocrites to be saints. The church invisible is unseen by every eye, save the eye of God. He only "knows them that are his." But in the discussion in which we are now engaged, we have to do mainly with

THE VISIBLE CHURCH.

The visible church, according to our Confession of Faith, "consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children; and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no

ordinary possibility of salvation." It comprehends, therefore, all men, no matter to what sect they belong, or how they may differ in some particulars, who profess faith in the Lord Jesus, acknowledge the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the only rule of faith and practice, and observe the ordinances of the gospel. Of this church Paul speaks: "I persecuted the church and wasted it;" "God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues." This church is called visible, because the persons who compose it are not angels or invisible spirits, but men dwelling in mortal flesh. It is a human society, and falls under the observation of our senses. Its members are known; its assemblies are public; we may be present in them and witness their peculiar rites and ceremonies. We recognize it as we recognize any other society. Having learned from the Scriptures the characteristics of its members, wherever we see a society which conforms to this Scripture pattern in its creed and observances, we must recognize that society as the visible church, or rather as a part of the visible church.

THE HEAD OF THE VISIBLE CHURCH.

The head of the visible church is Christ. In this

respect, it is like the church invisible. Christ says of it, "Upon this rock I will build *my* church." It is called "the church of God," "the church of the living God." Christ is said to be "the head of the church," and the church is said to be "subject unto Christ." It is not the outgrowth of human wisdom. God has established the church in the world. By his word and Spirit he calls men into it and prepares them for connection with it. He has given laws for its government, which are to be found in his inspired word. He has appointed certain officers, who are to administer its affairs under his supreme authority, and who are responsible to him for their faithfulness. He defends its members from their enemies and assures them of final victory. He has provided for them a home and a kingdom in the glory he has revealed. The church visible is God's church. It is compared to a temple, in which he delights to dwell. Every thing about this temple, from the foundation to the topmost stone, is designed by him and wrought out by his appointed agents. It therefore becomes us to think and speak of the church with reverence, for it is the dwelling-place of God.

THE DESIGN OF THE VISIBLE CHURCH.

As God is "the only wise God," we may be sure

that he had some design in establishing the church in the world. This design is plainly revealed in the Scriptures. It was designed to be the depository of divine truth, in which the truth should be preserved through all the ages, and by which it should be published to the world. To the Jewish church were committed "the oracles of God," and this sacred trust has been transferred to the Christian church. This is the reason why the Apostle calls the church "the pillar and ground of the truth." It is the province of the church to lift up the revealed truth in the presence of men, so that all may know and understand it. That church, no matter by what name it is called, which does not, as a pillar, hold up the truth, is not fulfilling the design of its appointment.

The church was also designed to maintain and preserve the ordinances of Christ. Prominent among these ordinances are the word, sacraments and prayer. These ordinances were appointed for the glory of God through the salvation of men, and it is important that they should be observed while there is a soul to be saved and a God to be glorified.

The church was also intended to be the asylum of sinners. It is the place of safety in that time of destruction which is coming on the wicked. It is like the cities of refuge in the promised land, to which

the man-slayer fled from the avenger of blood. Sinners are called by the gospel to leave the society of the world and to enter into the church by faith, that they may escape from the approaching woe.

The church is also the nursery of the saints. They have duties to do in the present life and a happiness to enjoy in the next; and they are trained and prepared for present duty and future happiness by the instructions, oversight and discipline of the church.

This is what God designed the church to be and to do; and that church which is not a depository of the truth, an observer of the ordinances of Christ, an asylum of sinners and a nursery of saints, is not fulfilling the end of its organization.

THE MEMBERS OF THE VISIBLE CHURCH.

As God is the King and head of the church, and as he has established it for the accomplishment of certain ends, it is evident that he alone has the right to prescribe the qualifications of its members. The teaching of the word on this point is summed up in the following statement: "All who profess faith in Christ and obedience to his laws, together with their children, are members of the visible church." From this statement, and from the texts of Scripture on which it is founded,

we can discover the qualifications of the members of the visible church.

1. One qualification is *baptism.* Christ has appointed this as the rite of initiation in his church. When he sent the apostles to establish the church on earth he commanded them: "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Men are to be made disciples by baptism. This does not mean that baptism would constitute them such, or that the apostles and their successors were to baptize all who came in their way; but that they were to receive into the visible church, by baptism, all who accepted the gospel and professed faith in Christ. As the uncircumcised were not recognized as members of the Jewish church, so the unbaptized have no right to enter the Christian church. It does not follow, however, that baptism is necessary to salvation, for men have been savingly enlightened when they were in such circumstances that baptism was impossible. No doubt, these men were members of the church invisible, but they were not members of the church visible; and it is of the visible church we are speaking. When men have access to this church they are bound by the highest authority to enter its communion. If a man knows that baptism is an ordinance of Christ, if it is

in his power to be baptized, and if he deliberately neglects this rite, he cannot be regarded as a member of either the visible or invisible church.

2. Another qualification of the members of the church is *knowledge.* It is not easy to say how much knowledge is necessary in order to a right profession of faith. Men differ so much in education, talents, and opportunities, that it would be unjust to require the same proficiency in all; but unless a person knows something about his own character and state, something about the person, offices and work of the Saviour, and something about the promises of God and the duties of a Christian, he cannot make an intelligent profession of faith, or be received as a member of the church. The ultimate standard of knowledge is the Scriptures. No one who is ignorant of the doctrines of grace, as revealed in the Bible, has a right to a place in the church.

3. Another qualification of the members of the church is *a profession of faith.* It is not simply the possession of knowledge which entitles a man to church membership, but a public declaration of his knowledge of the gospel, and of his acceptance of Christ as a Saviour. Nothing need be said here on this point, as it was discussed at considerable length in the last chapter.

4. Another qualification of the members of the church is *a holy life.* As this point was also discussed in the last chapter, we pass it by with the remark, that Jesus has made a holy life the rule by which we are to judge of the reality of our profession, and of the profession of others. "Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?"

The officers of the church have to judge whether professors of religion, and those who desire to become professors of religion, have these necessary qualifications; and as the officers of the church are men and fallible, they are sometimes deceived. Therefore, in the visible church there is a mixture of saints and sinners, as there is of wheat and tares in the field, and of grain and chaff on the threshing-floor; but every man who has been baptized, who possesses a sufficient knowledge of the Scriptures, who makes a public profession of faith, and who lives a consistent life, is to be recognized as a member of the visible church. If he is what he professes to be, he is also a member of the church invisible.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE VISIBLE CHURCH.

1. Its first characteristic is its *unity.* Though it is scattered through different lands and divided into dif-

ferent sects, it is one, because it has in all its divisions "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all." Those who profess the true religion agree in all fundamental points, and their oneness is not destroyed by their disagreement in minor points. Particular churches are but parts of the visible church, which is one.

2. Another characteristic of the church is its *catholicity*. It is adapted to the needs of all men, and its blessings are offered to all. It is called catholic, or universal, not because all men are members of it, but because it comprehends all, in every age and nation, who profess the true religion and observe the ordinances of the gospel. And inspired prophecy gives us reason to hope that, in some future age, all the world will be converted, and all its inhabitants will be worshipers of the living God and followers of his Christ.

3. Another characteristic of the church is its *perpetuity*. In the most degenerate times God has had a faithful seed to do him service, and we believe, on the best authority, that as the church has existed from its erection to the present day, so it will continue through all subsequent ages, till the second coming of Christ. "Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

DESPISING THE VISIBLE CHURCH.

We might suppose that all men who know anything about the visible church would delight to do it honor. God has established it in the world; its design is a noble one; its members are the honorable of earth; its characteristics are such as to commend it to a high place in our esteem. It would seem as if God had done everything to recommend his church to the favorable notice of men; and yet there are those who are daily brought into contact with the church who openly despise it.

How may we despise the church?

1. We may despise the church by *refusing to unite with it.* The Saviour commands us to confess him before men. We have seen that the appointed and only way of confessing our faith is by identifying ourselves with the church. Those who do not identify themselves with the church are guilty of open disobedience. They say that there is no use in the church; that they can be believers out of it as well as in it. God did not think so, or he would not have organized a church for the good of men. And what are we that we should claim to be wiser than God? Some excuse themselves for not uniting with the church because of the unworthy lives of church members. It is to be

regretted that their excuse has so much foundation. Nevertheless, when God instituted the visible church, he did not give the officers of that church the power of omniscience, to know the hearts of men. Therefore, there ever has been, and there ever will be, from the very nature of the case, a mixture of saints and sinners in the church. Though this is known to the Saviour, he commands men to confess him; and there is no better way of confessing him than by a union with the church, unworthy as many of its members confessedly are. The sins of others do not excuse our sinfulness. The inconsistent lives of church members do not repeal the command of God. As long as that command remains in force, those who refuse to connect themselves with the church are guilty of despising it.

2. We may despise the church by *an improper observance of its ordinances.* Some of the members of the Corinthian church had fallen into this sin. They had been recently converted from heathenism, and, taking pattern from the feasts they had been wont to observe in honor of their former gods, they made the Lord's Supper an occasion for revelry. Paul describes and rebukes their sin in the question, "Despise ye the church of God?" Professing Christians do not now make the sacrament of the Supper a drunken feast. But this is not the only way of observing improperly

the ordinances of religion. Those who do not perform the preparatory duty of self-examination, who look upon baptism with superstitious feelings, who hear and read the word of God with carelessness, and who neglect secret, family, or public prayer, are guilty of despising the ordinances of the church, and the church itself. They say by their conduct that the divinely appointed rites of religion are of no value.

3. We may despise the church by *endeavoring to do by other means what God intended to be done by his church.* We have already seen the design of God in establishing the church, but men sometimes try to accomplish this design in a way entirely separate from the church. They attempt to increase human happiness, to reform the vile, to care for the poor, and to instruct the young, by means of various societies and associations. The design of these societies may be commendable, but in so far as they aim to do what God intended to be done by his church, they are to be condemned; and those who identify themselves with these societies and neglect the church are manifestly guilty of despising the church.

This is the visible church with which we must unite if we would confess our faith in the appointed way. If we do not connect ourselves with it we despise it, and impute folly to God who established it in the

world. In uniting with the church we acknowledge Christ as our king, we profess to have the characteristics of its members, and we promise to labor and pray for the advancement of the great designs for which it was organized. In view of the love of God as manifested in the church, and of the privileges and blessings it offers to ourselves and others, the song of our grateful hearts should ever be, "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I do not prefer Jerusalem above my chief joy."

CHAPTER IV.

THE DIFFERENT CHURCHES.

I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. —1 *Cor.* xi. 18.

THE visible church is one, having "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all." This is what the word of God describes it to be. But when we turn to the church, as it actually exists on earth, we find that it is divided into different denominations, each one claiming that its creed and observances are more in accordance with the revealed will of God than those of any other. But we have seen that the visible church "consists of all those throughout the world who profess the true religion;" that they agree in all fundamental points, that their oneness is not destroyed by their disagreement in minor points, and that particular churches are but parts of the church visible, which is one. Still, it is impossible for a man to unite with all denominations; he must select one out of the many, and identify himself with it. Suppose, then, that we believe in Christ as our Saviour, and that we are persuaded that the appointed

way of confessing him before men is by uniting with his church, the question presents itself for an answer: With what denomination of the church should we unite? No man can answer this question intelligently, unless he knows something about the various denominations, and the grounds of their differences.

THE DIFFERENT FORMS OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT.

It would be difficult, if not impossible, to say into how many sects the visible church has been divided. Not a few of these sects, which have had an existence in former ages, have passed away, and little is known of them save their names. Many are now in existence, laboring side by side, and maintaining, with greater or less faithfulness, the truth of the gospel as they understand it. It is not unlikely that new sects will be organized in the future. One thing, in which these many sects differ, is in the form of their government. Their agreement or disagreement in this regard suggests a classification, which is easily remembered, and which is sufficient for our present purpose.

It is essential to a church that it should have some form of government. It is a human society, and men cannot work together with efficiency without a system of laws for the regulation of their conduct. It is thought by some that the form of church government

is a matter of little importance, and that it can be changed to meet the circumstances in which the church is placed. We are told that one form is best in one country and under one form of civil government, that another is best in another land, and that God has left it to the wisdom of his church to adapt itself to its surroundings, so far as the mere form of its government is concerned. But this theory is inconsistent with the minute directions God gave for the government of the Old Testament church. Its rulers, their duties, responsibilities and rank, are described with the greatest plainness. If God thus regulated the affairs of the Jewish church, it would be unreasonable to suppose that he would leave the Christian church without regulation. Nor is this theory consistent with the best interests of the church. The form of government is, without question, an important element in the growth, prosperity and success of the church. Ecclesiastical history proves conclusively that the purity and usefulness of the church depend largely on its methods of administration. It would not be consistent with the inspired representations of God's love and care for the Christian church, to suppose that he would suffer so important a matter as the form of its government to be determined by fallible men. The history of the Jewish church, and God's love for the Christian

church, must lead to the conclusion that some form of government is of divine appointment. What that appointed form is, can be learned only from the New Testament Scriptures.

It is generally agreed that the New Testament is the source of information on this point; but the different denominations do not understand its teachings in the same way. Therefore, some have adopted one form of government; others have adopted another; and all appeal to the Scriptures as their authority. The different churches, in respect to their forms of government, arrange themselves in three classes: the Episcopal, the Congregational, and the Presbyterian. To one of these classes every denomination must belong. Those who belong to the first class may differ in other matters, but they agree in maintaining that the Episcopal form of church government is the one authorized in the New Testament. So those who belong to the second class are of the opinion that Congregationalism, and those who belong to the third class, that Presbyterianism is the appointed form for the government of the New Testament church. The question before us is: Which opinion is correct? Is the Episcopal, the Congregational, or the Presbyterian form of government the one authorized by the word of God? When this matter is decided, we will know

with which of the three great divisions of the visible church we should unite in order to confess our faith in Christ before men; for it is evident that we should identify ourselves with the one, which is "agreeable to and founded on" the word of God. It must be admitted that the form of church government is not so fully and explicitly taught in the New Testament, as the fundamental articles of faith and the great duties of morality. None but the most furious zealot will dare to say that there is no room for a difference of opinion. Nevertheless, a study of the Scriptures, especially of the Acts of the Apostles, and of the worship and government of the Jewish synagogue, which is rightly supposed to be the model of the Christian church, will lead to a reasonable certainty as to the appointed order of church government. We will take up the three forms of church government, and test them by the infallible standard. An exhaustive discussion is impossible here. Such a discussion would require a volume. We will attempt only in the briefest and plainest manner to reach the truth.

THE EPISCOPAL FORM OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT.

In Episcopacy there are three orders of spiritual officers—deacons, priests or presbyters, and bishops. The lowest is the order of deacons, whose office is to read

the Scriptures, homilies, and prayers to the people, and to assist the presbyters in the administration of the sacraments. It is the duty of the presbyters to preach, to read prayers, and to administer the sacraments. It belongs to the bishops to confirm those who have been baptized, to ordain, try, and depose presbyters and deacons, and to rule over their dioceses, in which all the clergy are subject to their authority. Neither presbyters nor deacons have any share in the government of the church—it is vested solely in the bishops. The Roman Catholic church, the Protestant Episcopal church, the Methodist Episcopal church, and a few others less widely known, are the representatives of this form of church government. These churches differ somewhat in their administration; for example, the Roman Catholic church affirms that the bishop or Pope of Rome is the head of the visible church, and that from him all the other bishops derive their authority; but they are alike in maintaining that there are orders of spiritual officers, unequal in rank and diverse in duty, and that the power of government belongs alone to the bishops. Hence the name Episcopal, which is derived from a Greek word which means bishop.

What are the Scripture arguments in support of this form of government? Are these arguments well

founded and convincing? One argument is drawn from the constitution of the Jewish church, in which there was, without question, a gradation in rank. The Levites performed various inferior services in the tabernacle and temple; the priests offered sacrifices on the altar; the high priest presided over all, and entered into the holy of holies. And it has been inferred that the same form of government has been continued in the Christian church. It is to be remembered that this arrangement belonged to the ceremonial system, and that the ceremonial system was abolished at the death of Christ. Therefore, the Old Testament argument has no weight; our appeal must be to the Scriptures of the New Testament.

Another argument in support of the Episcopal form of church government is founded on the fact that bishops, presbyters, and deacons are all mentioned in the New Testament. It is to be remembered that the words "presbyter" and "elder" have the same meaning, and describe the same persons. It is true that there were deacons in the early church. We have a minute account of the circumstances which gave rise to their appointment. From this account, we learn that their official power pertained only to temporal things. They were chosen to "serve tables." They had to do with the temporalities of the church, especially the

collection and distribution of its charities. They had no spiritual authority. It is, therefore, evident that the deacons of the early church were not like the deacons under the Episcopal form of government, for the latter are regarded as spiritual officers. Their names are the same, but their duties are entirely different. The assertion that the deacon is a spiritual officer is not in harmony with the teaching of the New Testament. It is also true that there were those in the early church who are called bishops, or overseers; for the word translated "bishop" literally means "overseer," and sometimes it is so rendered. It is assumed by those who believe Episcopacy to be of divine appointment that bishops are a different order from presbyters or elders. But when we look into the New Testament, we find that they are convertible terms, and that they are applied to the same individuals. When Paul was on his way to Jerusalem, he stopped at Miletus, "and from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church." When they came to him, he said, among other things, "Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves, and to the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers," or bishops. It is, therefore, evident that Paul knew of no distinction between a bishop and an elder, because the persons who are first called elders are afterwards called bish-

ops. Again, Paul says to Titus, "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city." Then, describing the character of those who were to be ordained elders, he adds: "For a bishop must be blameless." It would be a waste of time to attempt to show that, in this connection, the bishop and the elder are the same person. Because the terms are convertible, Paul makes no mention of elders in his first epistle to Timothy—he speaks only of bishops and deacons. For the same reason, he takes no notice of elders in his epistle to the Philippians—he addresses himself to bishops and deacons. This omission cannot be explained on the supposition that bishops and elders are different orders. We therefore conclude that in the New Testament bishop and elder are convertible terms, and describe the same officer.

Another argument in favor of the Episcopal form of government is founded on the fact that there was a distinction in rank among the office-bearers of the early church. It is at once granted that, at the organization of the New Testament church, there were some extraordinary officers, prominent among whom were the apostles, ordained to be witnesses of the resurrection of Christ, and endowed with miraculous powers. It is manifest that these extraordinary officers, in their

peculiar gifts and qualifications, can have no successors. The only permanent spiritual officers in the church, as we will show afterwards, are elders, who are also called presbyters and bishops.

It is not denied that other arguments are advanced in support of the Episcopacy, but the ones mentioned seem to be the strongest. As these strongest arguments have been shown to be invalid, we are forced to the conclusion that the Episcopal form of government is not the one which Christ has appointed for the New Testament church.

THE CONGREGATIONAL FORM OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT.

The peculiar principles of Congregationalism, or Independency, are the following: Every particular society of professors, agreeing to walk together in the faith and order of the gospel, is a complete church; the whole power of government is vested in each society; all censures and acts of government are administered in a single congregation. From these principles you will see the propriety of the name by which this form of government is distinguished. It is called Congregationalism or Independency, because each congregation is a church, distinct from, and independent of all other churches in the world, possessing all power in itself,

and accountable only to Christ. There can be no appeal from the decision of any congregation, for each congregation is supreme in its own affairs. Several congregations may, for mutual benefit, unite in an association, but the power of such an association is only advisory. The prominent representatives of this form of government are the Congregational and Baptist churches. They may differ in other things, but they agree that the power of government is vested in the congregation.

Let us examine the principles of Congregationalism and see whether they are founded on Scripture. One principle is that every society of professors is a complete church. To establish this principle, Independents labor to prove that the churches mentioned in the New Testament are all single congregations. It is granted that this is sometimes the meaning of the word, as when the church in the house of a certain individual is spoken of; but if the word is ever used to comprehend several congregations, we will be authorized to conclude that the Congregational plan of church government is unscriptural. Let us take the case of the church in Jerusalem, because its history is more fully detailed. The believers of this city are repeatedly called in the Acts of the Apostles "the church." Were they accustomed to assemble in one congregation,

or were they so numerous that they must have met, from the necessities of the case, in different congregations? What are the facts? We know that just after the ascension of our Lord, "the number of the names together were about one hundred and twenty." On the day of Pentecost, "three thousand souls were added to them." After the day of Pentecost, "the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." Not long after, under one sermon of the apostle Peter, five thousand men believed. The subsequent growth of the church in Jerusalem is indicated by such passages as these: "Believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women;" "the number of disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly;" "thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe." No doubt, many of these converts lived in foreign countries, but the home of the majority of them must have been in Jerusalem. Could all these thousands meet in one place for worship? There was no building in the city large enough to contain such a congregation, save the temple courts; and we may be sure that the leaders of the Jews would not permit the courts of the temple to be used as a place of Christian worship. The argument is strengthened by the fact that many official persons were engaged at the same time in administering the affairs of

the church in Jerusalem. All the apostles continued there for a season, and they were so much occupied in preaching that they found it impossible to care for the poor of the church. With the apostles were associated prophets, or inspired teachers, and elders. How could all these apostles, prophets and elders be employed, if there was only one congregation and one place of worship in Jerusalem? We must conclude that there were several congregations in the city, and that these congregations, taken together, are called the church in Jerusalem. Therefore, a single congregation is not a complete church, in the New Testament sense of the term, and this principle of Congregationalism falls to the ground.

Congregationalists also maintain that all acts of government are performed in a single congregation, and that from the decision of the congregation there is no appeal. Is this principle founded on Scripture? If we can find in the New Testament an appeal from a lower to a higher assembly, and if the decision of the higher was binding on the lower, we will be authorized to conclude that a single congregation does not possess complete powers of government. Is there such a case? It appears that certain Jewish teachers had taught the members of the church in Antioch, that unless they were circumcised after the manner of Moses, they could

not be saved. As this doctrine was contrary to the gospel, Paul and Barnabas opposed it, and sharp contention followed. To settle the controversy, which was of general as well as of local interest, it was resolved that "Paul and Barnabas and certain other of them should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question." When this delegation reached Jerusalem, "the apostles and elders came together to consider of this matter." After much discussion, in which Peter and James took a prominent part, the assembly of apostles and elders came to a unanimous decision, which was sent back to the church in Antioch and to the churches of Asia Minor, by the hand of the messengers who had brought up the appeal. It is to be observed that this decision was reached, not by inspiration, but by argument and discussion. It was the decision, not of the apostles in their official capacity, but of the apostles and elders sitting as a church court. It is also to be observed that this assembly did not give advice; it issued a decree, for so the sentence is expressly called. The Christians of Antioch were commanded to observe the "necessary things" which were contained in the decree. Now, if the members of a single congregation in the city of Antioch had power in all matters of government, they would have decided the question concerning

circumcision, and the church in Jerusalem would have had no right to issue a decree which would be binding on the members of other churches. We are, therefore, brought to the conclusion that this principle of Congregationalism is without Scripture authority. In the New Testament church the whole power of government is not vested in a single congregation, from which there is no appeal.

If these conclusions are correct, and they seem to rest on a stable foundation, it follows that the Congregational form of government is not the one which Christ has appointed for the New Testament church. What then is the form of church government which is "agreeable to, and founded on," the word of God? If it is not Episcopacy, or Congregationalism, it must be Presbyterianism; for these are the only forms which any one supposes to be authorized by the Scriptures. The Presbyterian order, and the arguments in its support, will be discussed in another chapter.

We must not suffer this discussion to drive out of our memory the former discussions. Important as the form of church government confessedly is, it is not as important as the matter of faith in Christ. Every man's first duty is to accept Christ as his Saviour; his second duty is to confess his faith before men. When he is persuaded that the appointed way of confessing

his faith is by a union with some church, he may confidently hope that the Spirit will enlighten his mind and direct him to the church with which he should unite. Still, he cannot expect the enlightenment of the Spirit in this direction or in any other, unless he uses the proper means. We have been trying to assist you in the use of such means. If the conclusions of the present chapter are correct, the man who believes in Christ, and who would confess him before men, should unite with some church, holding to the Presbyterian form of government, for this is the form of church government which rests on the sure foundation of the word of God.

CHAPTER V.

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHES.

Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.—1 *Tim.* iv. 14.

WE have seen that the various denominations in the visible church, so far as their form of government is concerned, arrange themselves in three classes, the Episcopal, the Congregational, and the Presbyterian. Setting aside Erastianism, which teaches that the church is only one form of the state, and Quakerism, which does not provide for the external organization of the church, these are the only three radically different theories on the subject of church polity. It has been shown that neither Episcopacy nor Congregationalism is, in its distinguishing principles, in harmony with the teachings of the New Testament. We, therefore, infer that Presbyterianism is the form of church government which is "agreeable to, and founded on," the word of God. But we are not left to inference alone. A study of the Scriptures will lead to a reasonable certainty on this disputed point.

What is Presbyterianism? What are the principles which distinguish it from the other forms of church government? Are these principles scriptural? In attempting to answer these questions our appeal must be to the word of God; for if God has appointed any order for the government of his church, we can learn what that appointed order is only from what God has revealed. We might express it as an opinion that the Presbyterian polity is the best fitted for accomplishing the ends for which the church was organized; that it is in harmony with the best form of civil government; that Episcopacy, like an absolute monarchy, does not allow sufficient liberty to the individual; that Congregationalism, like the doctrine of State sovereignty, is fatal to necessary unity and strength; and that Presbyterianism, like a republican form of government, unites individual freedom with consolidated power. We might support these opinions by many strong arguments drawn from the nature of things and from human experience. Nevertheless, our final appeal must be to the Scriptures, for from them alone can we hope to learn the will of God concerning his church. And our appeal must be to the Scriptures of the New Testament, for the questions before us have to do with the government of the New Testament church, and not with that of the Old. We will describe the officers

and courts of Presbyterianism, and see whether they have any authority in the New Testament.

THE OFFICERS UNDER THE PRESBYTERIAN FORM OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT.

1. Under the Presbyterian polity, the highest ordinary officer in the New Testament church is *the teaching elder* or minister, who is invested with all the powers that are permanent in the church. His duties are "to preach the word, administer the ordinances, govern the church, bless the people, ordain successors, and in general watch for souls." That such an officer is mentioned and sanctioned in the New Testament will not be denied. "He is called by different names in Scripture, to express the different relations and duties of his office: teacher, in reference to his duty to instruct the people; bishop, in reference to his oversight of the flock; pastor, in reference to his entire work of feeding, as well as governing, the flock; ambassador, in reference to his relations and duties as one commissioned to declare the divine will, and beseech men in Christ's stead to be reconciled to God; and minister, in reference to his relations and duties as a servant of Christ and his church."

This office is of divine appointment. Ministers are not only ordained of God in the sense in which the

civil powers are ordained of God; they also derive their authority from Christ, and not from the people. This is proven by the plain assertions of Scripture. We are told that Christ "gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, and for the edifying of the body of Christ." Christ, and not the people, appointed these teachers. Paul thus exhorts the elders of Ephesus: "Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves, and to the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you bishops." The same apostle says to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord." Of himself he says, "Christ hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation." For these reasons ministers are called the servants, the messengers and the ambassadors of Christ. They speak in his name and by his authority. They are sent by him to the church to reprove, rebuke and exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine. They are indeed the servants of the church, for they labor in its service and are subject to its authority; but they do not receive their commission and power from the church. It follows from all this that the teaching elder is an officer of divine appointment.

The qualifications required for this office are laid

down in the Scriptures. Ministers must be apt to teach, well instructed, able rightly to divide the word of truth, sound in the faith, ruling their own families well; for if a man cannot rule his own house, how can he take care of the church of God? Their duties are also plainly described in the Scriptures. They are to preach the word and administer the sacraments. They are the organs of the church in executing the great commission of the Master, to make disciples of all men, teaching them, and baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. They are rulers in the house of God. To them are given the keys of the kingdom, and the power to open and shut the door of the church. They are clothed with these powers of preaching, administering the sacraments, ruling and exercising discipline, in virtue of the office which Christ has conferred upon them. If they are sent where no church exists, they exercise these powers in gathering and founding churches; if they labor in churches already established, they exercise these powers in concert with other laborers. When the minister is alone he must, of necessity, perform his duties alone; but when churches are gathered and organized, he is associated with other ministers and elders, and he can no longer act alone in matters of government and discipline. This is illustrated in the early

history of the Christian church. The apostles, and those ordained by them, at first acted singly in founding churches; but afterwards always in connection with others.

The office of the teaching elder is a permanent one. This is plain from several reasons. The gifts and qualifications for this office are permanent. In this respect the teaching elder differs from the extraordinary officers in the early church. The apostles were qualified for their office by being competent witnesses of the resurrection of Christ, and by the endowment of miraculous powers. As these apostolic gifts have passed away, there can now be no apostolic office. The prophets of the New Testament were the recipients of occasional inspiration. As the gift of inspiration has ceased, the office of prophet has ceased; but as the gifts of teaching and ruling are permanent, we conclude that the office of teacher and ruler is permanent. The need of this office is permanent. Ministers are commissioned to make disciples of all nations, to preach the gospel and to edify saints; and while there are souls to be converted, a gospel to be preached, and saints to be built up in their most holy faith, teaching elders will be needed. Therefore the apostles ordained elders in every city, gave directions for their ordination in all subsequent ages, and prescribed their qualifications and

the mode of their appointment. In point of fact, teaching elders have continued from the beginning to the present day, and we have good reason to believe that they will continue to occupy their place in the church till the end of the dispensation.

The teaching elder is the highest permanent officer in the church. It is admitted that there were officers of a higher grade in the apostolic age, viz., apostles and prophets; but the peculiar gifts by which they were qualified for their offices are no longer conferred upon men, and therefore they can have no successors. There are no higher permanent functions than those attributed to ministers. It is theirs to teach and to rule, and what higher office can there be?

This much, then, is plain. The teaching elder is an officer of divine appointment. His names, qualifications, duties, and the permanence and rank of his office are matters of revelation. He is the highest permanent officer in the New Testament church.

2. Under the Presbyterian polity, the second in rank of the ordinary officers of the church is *the ruling elder.* "His official power is that of government alone, and in this he is the equal of the teaching elder. He is to rule well; and while he may not officially labor in word and doctrine, he is to be a help in teaching, as in ruling, instructing the ignorant, encouraging the weak,

reproving and reclaiming the erring, and visiting and comforting the sick."

These are the duties of the ruling elder, as laid down in the manuals of Presbyterianism. Is such an officer appointed in the New Testament? Paul says to Timothy: "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially them who labor in word and doctrine." From this passage it is evident that Paul recognized two classes of elders, those whose duty it was to rule, and those whose duty it was to rule and teach. The same apostle, when enumerating the orders of church officers, distinctly calls some "teachers," and others "helps" and "governments." The same apostle, in another epistle, exhorts those who teach to wait on their teaching, and those who rule to rule with diligence. These passages certainly prove that there was, in the early church, an officer whose official power, in connection with the teaching elder, was that of government. And this is the officer who, in the Presbyterian polity, is called the ruling elder.

We reach the same conclusion from inspired revelations respecting the rights and powers of the people. The church is a theocracy. Jesus Christ is its head. His word is its written constitution. All power is derived from him. But the church is a society, having its officers, laws and government. Its power, however,

is purely administrative. Everything it does is to be done in the name of Christ, and in accordance with his directions. The church has, with this limitation, the power to set forth in a creed a declaration of the truths which it believes to be taught in the word of God, and which are to be acknowledged by all who enter its communion. It has power to adopt rules for the ordering of public worship and for its own government. It has power to select and ordain teachers, to assign them to their fields of labor, and to depose them if unfaithful. It has power to receive the worthy into its fellowship, and to exclude the unworthy. Now, the question is, where does this power rest? Does it belong to the clergy exclusively? or does it belong to the whole church, to the people as well as to the ministry? Manifestly to the whole church. All church power arises from the indwelling of the Spirit. Therefore those in whom the Spirit dwells are the seat of church power. But the Spirit dwells in the whole church, and not in the clergy alone. Hence the members of the church have a right to a part in its government. This right is recognized and sanctioned by the apostles in almost every conceivable way. When they thought it necessary to complete the college of the apostles, they consulted the people in the matter. When deacons were appointed, the people chose the seven men who were

to be invested with the office. The assembly, which issued the authoritative decree concerning the continued obligation of the law of Moses, was composed of "brethren," as well as "apostles and elders." Now, according to the Presbyterian system, ruling elders are the representatives of the people. They are chosen by the people to act in their name in the government of the church. And what are the powers of ruling elders in Presbyterianism? They have a voice with the teaching elders in framing and adopting the creed of the church, in forming a directory for worship and enjoining its use, in enacting rules for its government, and in opening and shutting the door of the church in the admission of members and the exercise of discipline. Thus the Presbyterian polity, in the office of the ruling elder, fulfils the Scripture by giving the people a part in the government of the church.

The New Testament does not speak so plainly with reference to the duties of the ruling elder, as it does with reference to those of the teaching elder. The reason of this is not difficult to discover. The former office was no new thing in the church. There were elders in the Jewish church. There was, in every synagogue, a bench of elders who ruled over its affairs. The early Christians were Jews, and they were familiar with the government of the synagogue. As the ruling

elder was so much like the elder in the synagogue, few instructions would be needed as to the duties of this office. It was otherwise with the teaching elder. His office, in some of its relations and duties, was a new thing, and therefore its duties are more minutely described. Still, as we have seen, the ruling elder is recognized in the New Testament as a permanent officer in the church.

3. Under the Presbyterian polity, the lowest of the ordinary officers of the church is *the deacon.* "His official power pertains to temporal things. He has no spiritual authority. The duties of his office pertain to the temporalities of the church, especially the collection and distribution of its charities." That there was such an officer in the early church, and that these were the duties of his office, is plain from Acts vi. 1–6, where we have an account of the election and ordination of the first deacons, and of the circumstances which gave rise to their appointment. Deacons are not essential to the organization of the church, for the church existed for a time before deacons were ordained. In church government, the lower office is included in the higher; and if the teaching and ruling elders have the time and ability to care for the poor, this is a legitimate part of their work, and there is no occasion for the appointment of deacons. Nevertheless, there was

such an officer in the early church, and he is given a place in the Presbyterian form of government.

These are the three orders of permanent officers in Presbyterianism. As we have seen that they, and no others, are authorized in the Scriptures of the New Testament, we conclude that the Presbyterian form of church government, so far as its officers are concerned, is "agreeable to, and founded on," the word of God.

THE COURTS UNDER THE PRESBYTERIAN FORM OF GOVERNMENT.

The Presbyterian doctrine on this subject is, that the church is one in the sense that a smaller part is subject to a larger, and a larger to the whole. Hence, in its gradation of courts, Presbyterianism provides, on the one hand, for the right of appeal, and on the other hand, for the right of review and control. Is this doctrine scriptural? Let us notice the courts of Presbyterianism, and see whether they are sanctioned in the New Testament.

1. The lowest court of the church is *the Session*, which consists of the elders in a particular congregation. Usually there is one, and but one, teaching elder, who is elected by the people, and ordained and installed by the Presbytery. By virtue of his office,

he is the moderator of the Session. Associated with him are several ruling elders. "The Session is charged with the spiritual oversight and government of the congregation. It belongs to it to decide upon the qualifications of applicants for church membership, to inquire into the knowledge, character and conduct of members, to arraign offenders, to admonish, rebuke or suspend them, as the proper exercise of discipline may require; to dismiss members in good standing with proper certificates to other congregations, and to do whatever else pertains to their office in maintaining the good order and promoting the edification of the church."

The divine authority of this court is evident from the history of the organization of the church, as recorded in the Acts and Epistles of the apostles. That history shows that the first Christian congregations were placed under the rule of elders, after the model of the synagogue. We are told that Paul and Barnabas "ordained elders in every church." Titus was left in Crete to "ordain elders in every city." James says: "Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church." We read of the "elders" of the church in Jerusalem, in Antioch, in Ephesus, and in various other cities. It is evident from these passages in their connection that there were elders, both

teaching and ruling, who had the spiritual oversight of the congregation with which they were connected. It is true, comparatively little is said in the New Testament of the constitution and duties of this court of the church. This is explained on the same ground that little is said of the ruling elder. The early Christians were familiar with the bench of elders in the synagogue, and they needed little instruction on this point. But enough has been said by the inspired writers to convince the careful reader that the New Testament church was organized after the model of the synagogue, and that the affairs of each congregation were regulated by a Session, composed of teaching and ruling elders.

2. The next court of the church is *the Presbytery*, which consists of the ministers and one ruling elder from each pastoral charge in a defined district. It belongs to the Presbytery "to hear and issue complaints and appeals from church Sessions, and references for advice or adjudication, to admit and have the care of students of theology, to examine and license candidates for the holy ministry, to ordain, install, remove and try ministers of the gospel, to examine and approve or censure the records of church Sessions, to visit particular churches for the purpose of inquiring into their state and redressing evils which may have

arisen in them; to organize, unite or divide congregations, and in general to order whatever pertains to the spiritual welfare and prosperity of the churches under its care."

The authority of this court, like that of the Session, is in the example of the primitive church. The facts recorded in respect to the churches of Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, and Corinth, prove them to have been, in every essential particular, under an organization answering to a Presbytery. It is evident that there were several congregations in each of these cities; that they were intimately associated in government, and that their bond of union was an assembly of elders, whose decrees were binding. Such an assembly is a Presbytery.

3. The next higher court of the church is *the Synod*, which consists of the ministers and duly commissioned elders of two or more Presbyteries. "It belongs to the Synod to hear and issue complaints, appeals and references regularly brought up from the Presbyteries, to examine and approve or censure the records of Presbyteries, to organize, unite or divide Presbyteries, to propose to the General Assembly such measures as may be deemed necessary for the welfare of the whole church, and in general to take such order with respect to Presbyteries, Sessions and the people under its care,

as may, in conformity with the word of God and the established rules of the church, tend to promote the edification, purity, peace and prosperity of the church."

As the Synod is in fact but a larger Presbytery, its divine authority is the same as that of the Presbytery. The assembly of apostles and elders, noticed at considerable length in the last chapter, which decided the question concerning circumcision, referred to it by the Presbytery of Antioch, was in all essential features a Synod.

4. The highest court of the church is *the General Assembly*, which may be an aggregate or a delegate body, as the circumstances of the church may require or permit. If it is an aggregate body, it consists of the ministers and duly commissioned elders of all the Presbyteries of the church. If it is a delegate body, it consists of an equal delegation of teaching and ruling elders from each Presbytery. It has "power to receive and decide all appeals, references and complaints regularly brought before it, to review, approve or censure the records of Synods, to resolve questions of doctrine or discipline reasonably and seriously proposed, to warn and testify against any error in doctrine or immorality in practice, to organize, unite or divide Synods, to establish and regulate theological seminaries so as to

secure uniformity in the course and term of study, to conduct the missionary operations of the church, to correspond with other branches of the church, and in general to adopt measures to promote truth and holiness throughout its bounds, and be a bond of union, peace, concord and mutual confidence."

The General Assembly is the great Presbytery in which the entire church is represented, and therefore its divine authority is the same as that of the Presbytery.

These are the courts of Presbyterianism. They secure to all within its pale the right to a part in its government and the privilege of appeal; and they make the church one in the sense that a smaller part is subject to a larger, and a larger to the whole. As we have seen that these courts are authorized in the Scriptures of the New Testament, we conclude that the Presbyterian form of government, so far as its courts are concerned, is "agreeable to, and founded on," the word of God.

We must not forget the question, which underlies our discussion. It is this: If union with the church is the appointed way of confessing our faith in Christ before men, with what denomination of the visible church should we unite? If the conclusions of this chapter are correct, we should identify ourselves with

some branch of the church holding to the Presbyterian form of government, for this is the form authorized in the New Testament. While the system of government is not a matter of the first importance, it deserves our serious thought. Everything which God reveals is important. We must decide as to the truth on this subject, and be responsible for our decision. But lest you should think this matter of greater importance than it is, we point once more to the chief duty: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ;" then pray for the enlightenment of the Spirit that you may be guided to the fellowship of those who, in church government and everything else, live nearest the Scripture standard.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CREED OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHES.

To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.—*Isaiah* viii. 20.

SEVERAL denominations of the visible church hold to the Presbyterian form of government. The prominent representatives of this polity in our land are the United Presbyterian Church, the Presbyterian Church, the Reformed Presbyterian Churches, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, the Lutheran Churches, and the Reformed (Dutch) Church. These churches differ somewhat in the details of their administration, but they agree that Presbyterianism, or government by elders, is best fitted to accomplish the ends for which the church was organized, and that it is in harmony with the letter and spirit of the New Testament. They also agree in the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, though in some points they do not "see eye to eye." The doctrines in which they agree, and in which they disagree, are plainly set forth in their respective creeds. We have already reached

the conclusion, that if we would confess our faith in Christ before men in the appointed way, we must unite with some church holding to the Presbyterian form of government. The question now before us is this: With what denomination of the Presbyterian family should we identify ourselves? In order to answer this question intelligently, we must learn, from an appeal to their creeds, wherein they agree and wherein they differ, and we must decide whose creed is the best expression of divine truth. To assist in this direction, we will in the present chapter consider church creeds in general, and the particular creed of the Presbyterian churches.

A CHURCH CREED.

What is a church creed? It is a summary of Christian doctrines or articles of faith. Is there any necessity for such a summary? Do we not have a sufficient creed in the Holy Scriptures? All evangelical Christians believe the Bible to be the infallible and only rule of faith and practice, to which nothing is to be added and from which nothing is to be taken. Why, then, is any other creed needed? Simply because all men do not understand the word of God in the same way. Some maintain that it teaches one doctrine; others, that it teaches another. This want of harmony in understanding the Scriptures is an evidence of the

power of sin. Of course, God's word teaches only one system of truth; and if all Christians possessed the full illumination of the Spirit, they would be of one heart and mind. But, unfortunately, through imperfect enlightenment, a faulty education and strong prejudices, they differ in their understanding of the Holy Scriptures. As each denomination of the church is a human society, there must be an agreement among its members; for how "can two walk together except they be agreed?" Hence the necessity of a creed, which expresses in plain language what the church believes to be the teachings of the word of God, and which is to be assented to by those who enter its communion. Nearly all denominations have framed and adopted such a creed, and they regard it as essential to their harmony and unity.

There has been a continuous and marked growth in the creed of the church. The creed of the primitive church was brief and simple. It would seem that men were received into the visible society of believers on their public confession that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God and the promised Messiah. This confession involved the great difference between the Jewish and the Christian churches. The members of both believed the Scriptures of the Old Testament to be the word of God; but the members of the former regarded

Jesus as an impostor, while the members of the latter acknowledged him as the Saviour promised to the fathers. Therefore the only article of faith to which they were required to assent, who would become members of the primitive church, is expressed in these words: "We believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God." But errors rapidly multiplied; and to meet these errors, the church found it necessary to enlarge its creed. One article after another was added to it, until, by the middle of the second century of the Christian era, it formed that brief summary of Christian doctrine which is commonly called the Apostles' Creed. It received this name from the tradition that it was made by the apostles themselves, who, at a meeting in Jerusalem, contributed each an article toward an authentic, compendious and unchangeable rule of faith; but this tradition rests on no historical evidence. This creed, interesting from its antiquity and from its general adoption by the Greek, Roman and Protestant churches, reads as follows: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; he descended into hell, the third day he rose from the dead; he ascended into

heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead: I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen."

In the following centuries the creed of the church continued to enlarge. As other truths were more clearly apprehended, the church thought it necessary to formulate them in its creed; when new errors were taught, the church testified against them in its creed. Therefore the creed of the church has ever been changing, and changing for the most part in the way of enlargement; though when an error has been forgotten, the testimony against it has sometimes been dropped. The creed of the church of the present day is a complete system of doctrine, as the church believes it to be revealed in the word of God, and a testimony against all prevalent errors. It is not infallible, for it is the work of men. It is to be tested by its agreement with the word of God. Therefore the creeds of the churches are called their "subordinate standards," the supreme standard being the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. It may be confidently expected that these subordinate standards will, in the future, change for the better, as Christians are more enlightened by the

Spirit and brought to a better understanding of the divine will.

The Presbyterian churches have their creeds. These creeds, while agreeing in substance of doctrine, differ somewhat in the different branches of the Presbyterian family. The most of the English-speaking Presbyterian churches have the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Catechisms, Larger and Shorter; the Lutheran churches have the Augsburg Confession; the Reformed Dutch Church has the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession; and the Presbyterian churches of every nationality have their own subordinate standards. To the first of these we now invite attention.

THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH.

1. *The history* of the preparation of the Westminster Confession of Faith is of great interest. The attempt of Charles I. to force upon the Scottish Church the liturgy of the Church of England, and his oppression of the dissenting bodies, caused great dissatisfaction both in England and Scotland. This dissatisfaction led Parliament to propose to the king that he should give his assent to a bill for calling an assembly of learned and godly divines and others, for the settlement of the government and liturgy of the church.

The king refused to give his assent, but Parliament afterwards passed an ordinance calling such an assembly. The Parliament taking this action is the one famous in history as the long Parliament. The assembly thus called together is known as the Westminster Assembly of Divines, because it assembled at Westminster, England. It met July 1, 1643, and remained in session till February 22, 1649, or almost six years. During this time it held 1,163 sittings. Parliament summoned one hundred and fifty-one persons, viz., one hundred and twenty-one clergymen, ten lords and twenty commoners, to meet and constitute the Assembly. About twenty-five never appeared, and, to supply the deficiency, about twenty additional members were summoned. On September 15, 1643, four Scotch ministers and two commoners were, by warrant of Parliament, admitted to seats in the Assembly, but without the privilege of voting, as commissioners from the Church of Scotland. At the opening of the Assembly sixty-nine of the members were in attendance; at different times ninety-six were present, though the usual attendance ranged from sixty to eighty. The must of the members were Presbyterians; ten or twelve were Independents or Congregationalists; five or six styled themselves Erastians. Among those who were originally summoned there were about twenty-

five Episcopalians, but the most of them declined attending, though some took part in the earlier meetings of the Assembly.

The Assembly first turned its attention to the preparation of a "Directory of Government, Worship and Discipline." This was not finished till near the close of 1644, and it was ratified by Parliament January 3, 1645. The Assembly then engaged in preparing a Confession of Faith, which was finished and reported to Parliament April 29, 1647. To make the system of doctrine, contained in the Confession of Faith, more available for the instruction of the young and ignorant, two catechisms were prepared, one much larger than the other. The Shorter Catechism was finished and reported to Parliament, November 5, 1647, and the Larger, April 14, 1648. The Confession of Faith and catechisms were promptly ratified by the Scotch General Assembly, and they are now the standards of the Scotch, English and Irish Presbyterian churches. They have been adopted, with slight alterations concerning the power of the civil magistrate in religious matters, by the most of the Presbyterian bodies in the United States.

This is the history of the Westminster Confession of Faith, which is the common creed of the Presbyterian churches of Great Britain and Ireland, and of all other Presbyterian churches which have descended

from them. The men who framed it were the flower of the church of that age; it was prepared after protracted and able discussions; it has borne the test of use for almost two hundred and fifty years; and it is yet dear to many denominations of the visible church as their symbol of faith.

2. *A brief analysis* of the Westminster Confession of Faith is all that can be undertaken in this connection. It consists of thirty-three chapters, which, in their order, form a system of theology.

Chapter I., "Of the Holy Scriptures," teaches that the light of nature, though sufficient to leave men without excuse, is not sufficient to enable any to attain salvation. Hence, God has made a revelation of himself, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. These Scriptures are inspired, and the infallible and complete rule of faith and practice.

Chapter II., "Of God and the Holy Trinity," teaches that there is but one living and true God, who possesses all perfections in himself; that there are three persons in the Godhead, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost; and that these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.

Chapter III., "Of God's Eternal Decree," teaches that God, as the sovereign ruler over all his works,

has from eternity followed an unchangeable plan, which comprehends all persons, things and events.

Chapter IV., "Of Creation," teaches that God created the universe out of nothing for the manifestation of his own glory; that he created man, male and female, after his own image, in knowledge, righteousness and holiness, with dominion over his creatures; that the whole human family has descended from the one pair; and that our first parents, though holy, were capable of falling from the estate in which they were created.

Chapter V., "Of Providence," teaches that God, ordinarily through the agency of second causes, but at times by the direct energy of his purpose, continues to uphold all his creatures and direct all their actions; and that the end of his providential control is the manifestation of his own glory, through the discipline of his people and the punishment of his enemies.

Chapter VI., "Of the Fall of Man, of Sin, and of the Consequences thereof," teaches that our first parents, tempted by Satan, sinned against God by eating the forbidden fruit; that by this sin they were cut off from communion with God, lost their original righteousness, and were depraved in all their faculties; that all men sinned in Adam, who was their natural and federal head; that the sinfulness of that estate, into which they fell, consists of the guilt of Adam's first sin, the want

of original righteousness, and the corruption of their whole nature, together with all their actual transgressions; and that all sin, whether original or actual, deserves punishment here and hereafter.

Chapter VII., "Of God's Covenant with Man," teaches that God in sovereign grace entered into a covenant, called the covenant of works, with Adam as the representative of his descendants; that the promise of this covenant was life, and its condition, perfect obedience; that when this covenant was broken, God was pleased to enter into another covenant, commonly called the covenant of grace, to deliver men out of the estate of sin and misery, and bring them into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer; and that this covenant of grace, though variously administered under the different dispensations, is one and the same.

Chapter VIII., "Of Christ, the Mediator," teaches that Christ, as the appointed and voluntary Mediator, was prophet, priest and king; that he was true man and very God in one person; that he acts as Mediator both in his estate of humiliation and in his estate of exaltation; that he fully satisfied for his people by his obedience and sufferings, and secured for them remission of sins and an eternal inheritance; and that he applies his redemption to all for whom he purchased it by his intercession, revelation, effectual calling and providences.

Chapter IX., "Of Free Will," teaches that man is endowed with the power of self-decision—that is, of deciding in every case as he pleases; and explains the peculiar conditions of human liberty in the estate of original innocence, in the estate of sin, in the estate of imperfectly sanctified saints on earth, and in the estate of glory.

Chapter X., "Of Effectual Calling," teaches that there is an internal as well as an external call necessary to salvation; that the subjects of the internal or effectual call are the elect; that it is an act of divine power through the Holy Ghost, and works a radical change in the moral condition of the whole man; and that it is effected by the instrumentality of the truth, except in the case of infants and others incapable of knowledge.

Chapter XI., "Of Justification," teaches that all those who are effectually called are justified; that justification is a judicial act of God, and is a declaration that the person justified is right in the eye of the law; and that it proceeds upon the imputation of Christ's righteousness, which is conditioned on faith alone.

Chapter XII., "Of Adoption," teaches the nature of adoption, and the privileges of those who are taken into the family of God.

Chapter XIII., "Of Sanctification," teaches that sanctification is a growth in holiness, wrought by the word and Spirit in those who are effectually called and justified; that it extends to the entire man; and that it is never perfect in the present life, though it never fails.

Chapter XIV., "Of Saving Faith," teaches that saving faith is the work of the Holy Ghost; that while its general object is the whole word of God, its specific acts are receiving and resting upon Christ alone for salvation; that it varies in strength in different persons and in the same persons at different periods; and that in time it grows up to the measure of full assurance.

Chapter XV., "Of Repentance unto Life," teaches that true repentance rests on a sense of guilt and pollution, and an apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ; that it consists in hatred of sin, turning unto God, and an endeavor after new obedience; that though there is no merit in repentance, every sin when repented of will be forgiven; that repentance should extend to all sins; and that every man should confess his sins to God, and to those who are injured by them.

Chapter XVI., "Of Good Works," teaches that any work, in order to be good, must be commanded and must spring from a right motive; that though the ability to do good works is wholly from God, we must

exert ourselves in this direction; that though the best works of believers are imperfect, they are accepted and rewarded through Christ; and that the works of the unregenerate are not acceptable in the sight of God.

Chapter XVII., "Of the Perseverance of the Saints," teaches that the true believer can never totally and finally fall from grace, though he may fall temporarily; and that the ground of this perseverance is not in the believer, but in the purpose, promise and grace of God.

Chapter XVIII., "Of Assurance of Grace and Salvation," teaches that true assurance of salvation rests upon the divine promises, the inward evidence of grace, and the witness of the Spirit; that it is attainable; that it may be lost in various ways; and that it should be sought as a great privilege.

Chapter XIX., "Of the Law of God," teaches that man was created a moral agent, subject to a moral law of absolute perfection; that this law, since the fall, is not the condition of salvation, but the rule of life; that it is summarily comprehended in the Ten Commandments; and that it continues in force in the gospel dispensation, and has manifold uses.

Chapter XX., "Of Christian Liberty, and Liberty of Conscience," teaches that Christian liberty includes

peace with God and deliverance from the guilt of sin, the power of corruption, and the bondage of Satan, afflictions and death; that God alone is Lord of the conscience; that his will is revealed only in the Scriptures; that to require or yield belief in those doctrines of men, which are contrary to the revealed will of God, is treason to him; that Christian liberty has its limits; and that God has established both church and state, and he requires obedience to each.

Chapter XXI., "Of Religious Worship, and the Sabbath Day," teaches the obligation, nature and only proper object of worship; the nature, matter and conditions of acceptable prayer; the ordinances of public, family and private worship; the law of the Sabbath, and the proper method of its observance.

Chapter XXII., "Of Lawful Oaths and Vows," teaches the nature and obligation of lawful oaths and vows.

Chapter XXIII., "Of the Civil Magistrate," teaches that civil government originates, not with the people, but with God; that its proximate end is the good of the community, and its ultimate end the glory of God; that it is lawful for Christians to be magistrates; and that the church and state are not to interfere with one another.

Chapter XXIV., "Of Marriage and Divorce,"

teaches the nature, end and lawfulness of marriage, and the grounds of lawful divorce.

Chapter XXV., "Of the Church," teaches that the invisible church consists of the whole number of the elect that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one; that the visible church consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children; that out of it there is no ordinary possibility of salvation; that it can never fail, though it may vary in purity at different times and places; and that Christ is its only head.

Chapter XXVI., "Of Communion of Saints," teaches the communion and fellowship of Christ and his people; and the communion, fellowship and mutual duties of the saints.

Chapter XXVII., "Of the Sacraments," teaches that a sacrament is an ordinance instituted by Christ; that it consists of a visible sign and an inward spiritual grace; that it was designed to represent, seal and apply the benefits of Christ to believers, and to be the badge of their profession; that its virtue does not depend on the piety or intention of the administrator, but on the divine appointment and the sovereign grace of the Spirit; and that there are only two sacraments in the new dispensation.

Chapter XXVIII., "Of Baptism," teaches that

baptism is a washing with water in the name of the Trinity; that it is designed to signify and seal our engrafting into Christ, and our engagement to be his; that not only professors of religion, but also infants of believers, are to be baptized; and that, though it is not essential to salvation, it is a duty.

Chapter XXIX., "Of the Lord's Supper," teaches the divine institution, perpetual obligation, design and effects of the Lord's Supper; points out the errors of the Roman Catholic Church in respect to this sacrament; and states the true relation between the bread and wine, and the flesh and blood of Christ.

Chapter XXX., "Of Church Censures," teaches the divine appointment of a government for the church, which is distinct from that of the state; the nature and extent of church power; and the ends and methods of discipline.

Chapter XXXI., "Of Synods and Councils," teaches the design of church courts; the way in which they are to be assembled; the matters which come under their jurisdiction; their authority; and the extent to which submission to their decisions is a duty.

Chapter XXXII., "Of the State of Men after Death, and of the Resurrection of the Dead," teaches that man consists of soul and body; that at death the bodies of all return to dust; that immediately after death the

souls of believers are made perfect in holiness, and pass into glory, while the souls of unbelievers are cast into the world of the lost; and that at the last day the living will be changed, and the bodies of the just and unjust, which were laid in the grave, will be raised and united with their souls.

Chapter XXXIII., "Of the Last Judgment," teaches that God has appointed a day of general judgment and has committed this judgment to his Son; that all are to be judged according to the deeds done in the body; that the righteous are to be exalted to eternal honor and happiness; that the ungodly are to be driven away to everlasting punishment; that the time of the judgment is unknown; and that this uncertainty should lead to constant watchfulness.

This is a very brief analysis of the Westminster Confession of Faith. We believe that, "for substance of doctrine," it is in harmony with the teaching of the Scriptures. In most of the copies of the Confession of Faith, the Scripture proofs are arranged under each section. We commend these proofs to your careful study. If such study brings you, as it has brought many, to the conviction that the Westminster Confession of Faith is a correct expression in human language of the divine will, you will be ready to give your intelligent assent to this common standard of the Presby-

terian churches. If the appointed way of confessing our faith in Christ is by a union with the church, you will be ready to unite with some branch of the Presbyterian family, for the Presbyterian Church, in its creed as well as in its form of government, "is agreeable to, and founded on," the word of God.

CHAPTER VII.

THE UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.—1 *Peter* iii. 15.

THE United Presbyterian Church is one branch of the great Presbyterian family. Wherein does it agree with other Presbyterian churches? Wherein does it differ from them? These questions will be answered in the present chapter.

ITS ORIGIN.

A brief sketch of the origin and history of the United Presbyterian Church will be of advantage in our investigations. In 1733 certain ministers seceded from the Established Church of Scotland, on the ground that there were corruptions in the doctrines of the church, and tyranny in the administration of its government. Soon after, they organized themselves as a Presbytery, which was called the Associate, or Secession Presbytery. For a time they performed no ju-

dicial acts; but after waiting for three years, and seeing no prospect of healing the breach between them and the mother church, they proceeded to do the proper work of a church court. At first there were but four seceding ministers, but their number increased so rapidly that they found it necessary, in 1744, to constitute themselves into a Synod, consisting of three Presbyteries.

A missionary spirit characterized the Associate Synod of Scotland from the very first, and one of its fields of missionary labor was the American colonies. That Synod received petition after petition from the Scotch and Scotch-Irish emigrants to America, to send them ministers. For a time nothing could be done in answer to these petitions, on account of the scarcity of ministers at home; but in 1753 two missionaries were sent to Pennsylvania, who organized themselves into a Presbytery, under the name of the Associate Presbytery of Pennsylvania. Afterwards other ministers were sent, and on May 20, 1776, the Presbytery was divided into two, viz., the Associate Presbytery of Pennsylvania and the Associate Presbytery of New York. There were at this time a few ministers in the United States who belonged to the Reformed Presbyterian or Covenanter Church. A union was formed between the Associate and Reformed Presbyterian churches, June 13, 1782, and the united body was

called, from the name of the churches composing it, the Associate Reformed Church. However, two ministers of the Associate Presbytery of Pennsylvania disapproved of this union and continued their old organization. This Presbytery was so strengthened by other ministers, sent out by the Associate Church of Scotland, that on May 3, 1800, it formed itself into a Synod, designated as the Associate Synod of North America.

This was the origin of the Associate and Associate Reformed Churches in this country. The two denominations occupied the same territory, and held substantially the same doctrines. The conviction grew stronger and stronger that they should be united. Efforts were made in the direction of union, but for many years these efforts were unsuccessful. At last, on May 26, 1858, the union between them was consummated in Pittsburgh, Pa., and the united body was called the United Presbyterian Church of North America.

In the year 1859 this church was composed of 42 Presbyteries, 408 ministers, 634 congregations, and 55,547 members; and during that year it raised for all purposes $22,989. Since that time its growth has been steady. In 1881 there were 61 Presbyteries, 704 ministers, 814 congregations, 82,937 members; and the

money raised amounted to $853,541, or an average of $10.74 per member.

As we look back over the long separation between the two denominations, which united to form the United Presbyterian Church, we can only wonder that Christians, who were so nearly of one mind, could have been content to remain apart for such a length of time. The harmony which has prevailed, and the progress which has been made, prove that their union has received the blessing of the King and Head of the church.

ITS GOVERNMENT.

The government of the United Presbyterian Church, as its name indicates, is Presbyterian. Its government, as set forth in its Book of Government and Discipline, does not differ materially from that of other Presbyterian churches. It was shown in a former chapter that Presbyterianism, in its officers and courts, is founded on the Scriptures. Therefore, the United Presbyterian Church is, in respect to its government, in harmony with the word of God.

ITS CREED.

It has already been stated that the Westminster Confession of Faith is the common creed of all English-speaking Presbyterian churches. The United

Presbyterian Church accepts this Confession, with some modifications respecting the power of the civil magistrate concerning religious affairs, as expressing in plain language the teaching of the Holy Scriptures in matters of faith and practice. An analysis of the Westminster Confession of Faith was given in the last chapter, and all were invited to test its truth by an appeal to the supreme standard of the inspired word. If this Confession is, as we believe, agreeable to and founded on the Scriptures, then the United Presbyterian Church, in respect to its creed, is in harmony with the word of God.

ITS TESTIMONY.

It may be said: If the United Presbyterian Church has the same form of government and the same creed with other Presbyterian churches, wherein does it differ from them? Why does it maintain a separate organization? These questions are important ones, and they deserve serious attention. It has been shown in another chapter that there has been, from the beginning of the present dispensation, a continual growth in the creed of the New Testament church. As the church increased in the knowledge of the truth, it thought it necessary to formulate that truth in its creed. As new errors were taught, the church testified against them in its creed. The fathers, who took an active part in

the union which resulted in the formation of the United Presbyterian Church, were of the opinion that there were certain points which were not distinctly and fully exhibited in the Westminster Confession of Faith, and which the circumstances of the church, the signs of the times, and the views and practices of other churches, demanded to be more explicitly stated. They accordingly prepared a statement of the truth on these points, and it was adopted by both the churches entering into the union. This statement is called the Testimony of the United Presbyterian Church. It contains a plain declaration of the belief of the church on those points in which the Westminster Confession of Faith seemed to be deficient, and it is a part of the church's creed. It consists of eighteen articles, on as many different subjects. We will take up these articles one by one, and show that they were needed on account of the want of explicitness in the Confession of Faith and the changed circumstances of the church, and briefly state the argument in their support.

Article I., "Of the Plenary Inspiration of the Scriptures," reads as follows: "We declare, not only that God has in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments made a revelation of his will to man, as the only rule of faith and practice, but that these Scriptures, viewed as a revelation from God, are in every

part the inspired word of God, and that this inspiration extends to the language as well as to the sentiments which they express."

The truth, here stated, is involved in the Confession of Faith, Chapter I., Section 2, in which, after mentioning the several books of the Old and New Testaments in their order, it is said, "All which are given by inspiration of God to be the rule of faith and practice."

But this statement, plain as it is, is not a sufficient testimony against certain errors of the present day. Loose views of inspiration are held by many who profess to believe that the Bible is the word of God. As an illustration of these views, it will be sufficient to say that some maintain that only portions of the Bible are inspired; others maintain that the thoughts of the Bible were inspired by the Holy Spirit, but that the writers, left unaided in the expression of these thoughts, fell into many errors. In opposition to these and similar theories of inspiration, the United Presbyterian Testimony asserts that the whole Bible is inspired, and that the inspiration extends to the language as well as to the thoughts. Does this doctrine of plenary or verbal inspiration accord with the teaching of the Scriptures? The truth of the doctrine may be inferred from the fact that the writers did not al-

ways fully understand what they wrote. Some of them wrote of great mysteries, which lie far beyond the reach of human knowledge; others predicted events which did not take place till hundreds of years after the predictions were uttered. But no man can write intelligibly on a subject he does not understand, unless the very language is dictated. But we are not left to inference; we are expressly told that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God," and that "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." Paul asserts that he spake in the words "which the Holy Ghost teacheth." David declares, "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue." The Scriptures are called again and again "the word of God." These assertions establish the doctrine that the inspiration of the Bible extends to the language as well as to the thoughts. The inspired penmen were so influenced by the Spirit that they recorded with infallible accuracy the ideas which they were moved to write. This is an important doctrine. Anything short of verbal inspiration weakens the authority of the Bible and throws a suspicion over its teachings. If the sentiments only are inspired, we can have no assurance that they are correctly expressed. Therefore, the Testimony speaks in plain language on this point, and its declaration is founded on the word of God.

Article II., "Of the Eternal Sonship of Christ," is, "We declare, that our Lord Jesus Christ is not only the true and Supreme God, being one in essence with the Father, but also the Son of God, in respect of his natural, necessary, and eternal relation to the Father."

This truth is exhibited in the Confession of Faith: "The Son is eternally begotten of the Father," Chapter II., Section 3. But there are those who say that our Lord is called the Son of God, because God gave him a human body, and sent him to the world on his mission of redemption. But this is not the doctrine of the inspired word. Christ was the Son of God before his incarnation. He could not be called the Son of God on account of his eternal appointment to the mediatorial office, for he is recognized as already a Son in the very act of appointment: "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee;" "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life." In harmony with these passages, the Testimony declares that our Lord is the Son of God, not because of his incarnation, but because of his relation to the Father as one of the persons of the Trinity.

Article III., "Of the Covenant of Works," is, "We

declare that God, having created man in a state of perfect holiness, and in possession of a perfect ability to obey him in all things, did enter into a covenant with him, in which covenant Adam was the representative of all his natural posterity, so that in him they were to stand or fall, as he stood or fell."

The teaching of the Confession of Faith on this point is in these words: "They," our first parents, "being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity, descending from them by ordinary generation," Chapter VI., Section 3. "The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience," Chapter VII., Section 2.

Many, who profess adherence to the Westminster Confession of Faith, affirm that Adam and his posterity are connected only by a principle of social liability, according to which his sin was the occasion, but not the judicial ground, of their sin and death, and that we have no more to do with the first sin of Adam than we have with the sin of any other parents. In opposition to this, the Testimony asserts that the transaction with Adam was a covenant, and that in this covenant Adam was the representative of all his posterity. Was

it a covenant? There are two parties mentioned, God and man; there is a promise on the part of God; there is a condition imposed on man; there is a mutual agreement between the parties, which is expressed, on the part of God, in his command and promise, and implied, on the part of man, in his acquiescence. Therefore, as this transaction has all the parts of a covenant, it is properly called a covenant between God and man. But was Adam the federal head or representative of his posterity in this covenant? The Scriptures tell us that "by one man sin entered into the world," that all were "made sinners" by his disobedience, and that all die in him. These passages prove that Adam was not only the natural head or parent of all men, but also that he was their moral head, who appeared and acted in their name as well as in his own. The same truth is taught by the inspired parallel, which is drawn between Adam as the representative of his posterity, and Christ as the representative of his spiritual seed. Therefore, the Testimony, in declaring that the transaction with Adam was a covenant, and that in this covenant Adam was the federal head of his posterity, is in harmony with the Scriptures.

Article IV., "Of the Fall of Man and His Present Inability," reads thus: "We declare that our first parents

did, by their breach of covenant with God, subject themselves to his eternal wrath, and bring themselves into such a state of depravity as to be wholly inclined to sin, and altogether unable, by their own power, to perform a single act of acceptable obedience to God; and that all their natural posterity, in virtue of their representation in the covenant, are born into the world in the same state of guilt, depravity and inability, and in this state will continue until delivered therefrom by the grace and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ."

The teaching of the Confession of Faith on this subject is as follows: Our first parents "being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity, descending from them by ordinary generation. From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions," Chapter VI., Section 3, 4. "Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being altogether averse from that good and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto," Chapter IX., Section 3.

There are those who profess to believe the Westminster standards, who assert that there is no such thing as original sin, that infants come into the world as free from corruption as Adam was when he was created, and that the impenitent sinner, without the aid of the Spirit, has power to repent, believe and perform good works. The article of the Testimony now under consideration is directed against these errors. That our first parents, by their sin, became subject to a death which included in it not only separation of the soul from the body, but also separation of both soul and body from the favor and presence of God, is evident from the account of the fall, and from the inspired references to it in other parts of Scripture. Do the posterity of Adam come into the world in this state of natural, spiritual and eternal death? We might infer an affirmative answer to this question from Adam's representative character, but we are not left to inference. The Scriptures declare that man is in a state of death and condemnation, that his understanding is darkened, that his will is opposed to the will of God, that his mind and conscience are defiled, that his affections are corrupted, and that his body is an instrument of unrighteousness. The Scriptures also assert that this state of condemnation and depravity is universal, extending to every individual of the human family;

that it is total, corrupting the whole man; and that it is native, having been brought with us into the world. If this is the natural condition of men, it is evident that they are not able to believe, or repent, or do anything which is pleasing to God. Their inability in this direction is expressly taught. The Saviour says, "Without me, ye can do nothing;" "No man can come unto me, except the Father which has sent me draw him." Paul declares that we were "without strength." We are represented as "dead," and as corrupt trees "which cannot bring forth good fruit." In accordance with these and similar passages of Scripture, the Testimony declares that we, as well as our first parents after the fall, are totally depraved and altogether unable to obey the commands of God, and that this state of depravity and inability will continue until we are delivered by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Article V., "Of the Nature and Extent of the Atonement," reads: "We declare that our Lord Jesus Christ did, by the appointment of the Father, and by his own gracious and voluntary act, place himself in the room of a definite number, who were chosen in him before the foundation of the world; so that he was their true and proper legal surety; and as such did, in their behalf, satisfy the justice of God, and answer all the

demands which the law had against them, and thereby infallibly obtain for them eternal redemption."

The doctrine here declared is the doctrine of the Confession of Faith: "The Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience and sacrifice of himself, which he through the eternal Spirit once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of his Father, and purchased not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto him." "To all those for whom Christ hath purchased redemption, he doth certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same," Chapter VIII., Sections 5, 8.

There are those who maintain that Christ did not die in the room of sinners, but only for sin in general, with the view of rendering salvation attainable, and equally attainable, by all. What is the truth, as revealed in the word of God? That our Lord sustained the character and relation of a substitute is plainly taught in the Scriptures. He is called "the surety of a better testament," or covenant. He was "made under the law to redeem them that were under the law." Our iniquities "were laid upon him;" he "bore our sins;" he was "made sin for us;" he was "made a curse for us." These and other passages establish the truth that our Lord was the legal surety

of his people. If he was their surety, he must have satisfied the justice of God and answered all the demands which the law had against them. The questions then present themselves for an answer: For whom did Christ act as surety? For whom did he satisfy the demands of the law? He must have died for sin in general, or for all the sins of all men, or for some of the sins of all men, or for all the sins of some men. He did not die for sin in general, for the Scriptures represent him as dying not merely for sins, but in the room of sinners. He did not die for all the sins of all men, for then all would be saved; inasmuch as it is impossible to conceive that any should be lost for whom Christ died. He did not die for some of the sins of all men, for then no one could be saved; for it is a revealed truth that no one can make a sufficient atonement for the least of his sins. Therefore, he must have died for all the sins of some men. Hence, those for whom Christ died are called his "seed," his "sheep," and his "church." They are gathered "out of all nations," "chosen," "given to him by the Father," "redeemed from among men." Christ expressly declares that he did not pray for any but his sheep; and we cannot conceive that he would refuse to pray for those for whom he died. It is certainly true that Christ's death possessed an infinite value. It was

sufficient as a ransom for all mankind, if it had been the design of God that all mankind should be redeemed by it. But the Scriptures represent him as dying for a definite number, for whom he satisfied all the demands of the law, and whose salvation he made infallibly sure. This Scripture doctrine is the one set forth in this article of the Testimony.

Article VI., "Of Imputed Righteousness," is: "We declare that in justification there is an imputation to the believer of that righteousness, or satisfaction and obedience, which the Lord Jesus Christ, as the surety of his people, rendered to the law; and that it is only on the ground of this imputed righteousness that his sins are pardoned, and his person accepted in the sight of God."

This declaration is evidently in accordance with the Confession of Faith: "Those whom God effectually calleth he also freely justifieth," "by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on him and his righteousness by faith," Chapter XI., Section 1.

Some affirm that the believer is justified on the ground of his faith. Now faith, though it is the gift of God, is nevertheless the act of the believer, in which he performs a duty required of him by God. If he is justified on the ground of his faith, his justification is

of works, which the Scriptures expressly deny. On what ground, then, are believers justified? The Testimony answers, on the ground of the imputed righteousness of Christ. The imputation of the righteousness of Christ is placing to the account of believers what Christ did as their surety. Is the satisfaction which he rendered to the law placed to their account? Such passages as these, "that we might be made the righteousness of God in him," "made unto us righteousness," "by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous," "the righteousness of God is unto all and upon all that believe," fully establish the doctrine of the imputation of the righteousness of Christ as the ground of the believer's justification before God. This is the doctrine stated in the article before us.

Article VII., "Of the Gospel Offer," is as follows: "We declare that the gospel, taken in its strict and proper sense, as distinguished from the law, is a revelation of grace to sinners as such; and that it contains a free and unconditional offer and grant of salvation through Christ to all who hear it, whatever may be their character or condition."

The doctrine here stated is implied, though somewhat obscurely, in the Confession of Faith, Chapter X., Section 4. After speaking of the effectual calling of the elect, it is said that others "may be called by the minister of the word."

Such an important doctrine demands a more explicit enunciation. The idea has been entertained that salvation is to be offered to none but penitent and awakened sinners, that only such sinners are warranted to come to Christ, and that sinners are first to prepare themselves to come to Christ by making themselves sensible of their need of him, and by exciting in their hearts a desire for his salvation. This article in the Testimony is opposed to this idea. It declares that the gospel, as distinguished from the law, contains neither precept nor sanction, and that it makes a free, unconditional and unlimited offer of Christ and salvation through him to all men. That the gospel contains such an offer is evident from the express testimony of God's word. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life;" "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out;" "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him and sup with him, and he with me;" "The Spirit and the bride say, come. And let him that heareth say, come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Therefore, the minister of the gospel is to offer a free and unconditional salvation to all, not because Christ

died for all, or because all will be saved, but because this is the command of him to whom the Father has given all power "in heaven and in earth," and because his obedience and death are a sufficient ransom for all.

Article VIII., "Of Saving Faith," is: "We declare that in true and saving faith there is not merely an assent of the mind to the proposition that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Saviour of sinners, but also a cordial reception and appropriation of him by the sinner as his Saviour, with an accompanying persuasion or assurance corresponding to the degree or strength of his faith, that he shall be saved by him; which appropriation and persuasion are founded solely upon the free, unconditional and unlimited offer of Christ and salvation in him, which God makes in the gospel to sinners of mankind."

The truth, here declared, is so plainly stated in the Confession of Faith, that there seems little need of this article of the Testimony. However, the importance of the doctrine is a sufficient reason for its frequent repetition. "By this faith, a Christian believeth to be true whatsoever is revealed in the word, for the authority of God himself speaking therein, and acteth differently upon that which each particular passage thereof containeth; yielding obedience to the commands, trembling at the threatenings, and embracing

the promises of God for this life and that which is to come. But the principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace," Chapter XIV., Section 2.

Faith, in the general acceptation of the term, is a belief in testimony. Human faith is a belief in human testimony; divine faith is a belief in divine testimony. But faith must always correspond with the testimony to be believed. If the gospel was only a record of facts and a statement of doctrines, an assent of the mind to these facts and doctrines would be the faith required. But the gospel is something more than this. What is the testimony of God concerning his Son? It is that he has made in the gospel a free and unconditional offer of Christ to us as sinners. To correspond with this testimony, we must receive and appropriate Christ. If we refuse to do this, we disbelieve the testimony of God, and make him a liar. This faith, which is not merely an assent of the mind, but also a reception and appropriation of Christ, must be accompanied by an assurance that he is our Saviour, which rests on the testimony of God speaking in his word. There is an assurance, which rests on our experience of the work of grace, begun in our hearts; but the assurance, referred to in the article before us, rests solely upon the

witness of God. We are persuaded that Christ is our Saviour, because he is freely offered to us in the gospel.

Article IX., "Of Evangelical Repentance," reads thus: "We declare that that repentance, which is a saving grace, is one of the fruits of a justifying faith; and of course cannot be regarded as a ground of the sinner's pardon, or as necessary to qualify him for coming to Christ."

The doctrine here presented is exhibited in the Confession of Faith, Chapter XV., Sections 2, 3: "By it a sinner, out of the sight and sense not only of the danger, but also of the filthiness and odiousness of his sins, as contrary to the holy nature and righteous law of God, and upon the apprehension of his mercy in Christ to such as are penitent, so grieves for and hates his sins as to turn from them all unto God, purposing and endeavoring to walk with him in all the ways of his commandments. Although repentance be not to be rested in as any satisfaction for sin, or any cause of pardon thereof, which is the act of God's free grace in Christ; yet it is of such necessity to all sinners, that none may expect pardon without it."

They are in error who call sinners to repentance as a means of appeasing the wrath of God, or as qualifying them for the reception of Christ by faith. This

article of the Testimony is directed against this error. It asserts that repentance does not go before faith, but that it follows faith as an immediate fruit or effect. That this is the truth will appear from the nature of these two acts of the soul, and from the testimony of the inspired word. "Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth with grief and hatred of his sin turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after new obedience." If this is a correct definition of evangelical repentance, and its correctness is assumed, it is evident that no one can exercise it until he believes in the existence of God, in the mission of Christ, and in the mercy of God in Christ. Therefore, the very nature of faith and repentance proves that the latter is a fruit of the former. We reach the same conclusion from the direct testimony of God's word. "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh. Then shall ye remember your evil ways and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight, for your iniquities and for your abominations." In accordance with this teaching, the Testimony asserts that a man's first duty is to believe in Christ, and that repentance is a fruit of faith.

Article X., "Of the Believer's Deliverance from the Law as a Covenant," is: "We declare that the moral law is of perpetual obligation, and consequently does and ever will bind the believer as a rule of life; yet as a covenant, he is, by his justification through Christ, completely and forever set free from it, both as to its commanding and condemning power, and consequently not required to yield obedience to it as a condition of life and salvation."

This declaration is in accordance with the Confession of Faith, Chapter XVI., Sections 2, 5: "These good works, done in obedience to God's commandments, are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith, and by them believers manifest their thankfulness, strengthen their assurance, edify their brethren, adorn the profession of the gospel, stop the mouths of the adversaries; whose workmanship they are, created in Christ Jesus thereunto, that, having their fruit unto holiness, they may have the end everlasting life. We cannot by our best works merit pardon of sin or eternal life at the hand of God, by reason of the great disproportion that is between them and the glory to come, and the infinite distance that is between us and God, whom by them we can neither profit nor satisfy for the debt of our former sins."

This article testifies against the error of those who

maintain that the moral law has been abrogated, and that it is not binding on Christians as a rule of life. That the moral law is of perpetual obligation is proven from the following considerations: It is called a law; its author is God, who is the great Lawgiver; it has never been repealed; we are expressly said to be "under law to Christ." But though believers are bound to keep the whole law, it is a truth clearly taught in the word of God, that they are entirely delivered from it as a covenant. It does not promise life to them in case of obedience, nor threaten them with death in case of disobedience. Their freedom from the law appears from the fact that Christ, as their surety and in their name, fulfilled its precepts and endured its penalty. It also appears from the declarations of the inspired word. Believers are "delivered from the law;" "not under the law, but under grace;" "dead to the law;" "justified by faith." But though the believer is delivered from the law as a covenant, he obeys it, not because of the fear of God's wrath, or because of the hope of life on the ground of his own works, but because of God's love for him, and his love for God. Such obedience is a sacrifice, with which the Lord is well pleased.

Article XI., "Of the Work of the Holy Spirit," is: "We declare that the Holy Spirit, the third person

of the Trinity, does, by a direct operation accompanying the word, so act upon the soul as to quicken, regenerate and sanctify it; and that without this direct operation, the soul would have no ability to perceive, in a saving manner, the truths of God's word, or yield to the motives which it presents."

This statement accords with the Confession of Faith, Chapter X., Section 1. "All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, he is pleased in his appointed and accepted time effectually to call, by his word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ, enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God, taking away their heart of stone and giving unto them a heart of flesh, renewing their wills, and by his almighty power determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ, yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by his grace."

This doctrine is opposed to the idea that regeneration and sanctification are the result of moral suasion, and of the mere presentation of truth to the mind. What is the condition of the sinner, as described in the word of God? He is represented as "dead in sins," and as "blind." If this is his condition, the precepts, doctrines, invitations and warnings of the Scripture can

have no effect on him, without the direct operation of God. That there is such an operation, and that it is the work of the Spirit, are truths of revelation. It is called a creation, a renewing of the Holy Ghost, the opening of the eyes, the opening of the understanding, a quickening, and the giving of a heart of flesh. The Spirit, in thus operating upon the soul, does not impart any new faculties, but quickens, exercises and sanctifies those which the sinner already possesses. This is the doctrine of the article before us.

Article XII., "Of the Headship of Christ," reads as follows: "We declare that our Lord Jesus Christ, besides the dominion which belongs to him as God, has as our God-man Mediator a twofold dominion, with which he has been invested by the Father as the reward of his sufferings. These are a dominion over the church, of which he is the living Head and Lawgiver, and the source of all that divine influence and authority by which she is sustained and governed; and also, a dominion over all created persons and things, which is exercised by him in subserviency to the manifestations of God's glory in the system of redemption, and the interests of his church."

The doctrine of Christ's headship is thus stated in the Confession of Faith, Chapter VIII., Section 1: "It pleased God in his eternal purpose to choose and

ordain the Lord Jesus, his only begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and man; the Prophet, Priest and King; the Head and Saviour of his church; the Heir of all things, and Judge of the world."

Christ as the second person of the Trinity has a dominion as God; but this article of the Testimony affirms that Christ, as Mediator, has a twofold dominion, distinct in some respects from his dominion as God. In the first place, it is affirmed that he has dominion over his church. For this we have the express testimony of the divine word. He is said to be the "Head" of the church. He calls the church his "kingdom." The angel declared that he should "reign over the house of Jacob forever." Isaiah says that "the government shall be upon his shoulder." Paul speaks of him as "a son over his own house." David sings of his "throne" and "sceptre." It is, therefore, his exclusive prerogative to provide for the preservation and perpetuation of his church; and it is a blasphemous assumption of power, and a direct encroachment on the rights of the Lord Jesus, for any man, or any body of men, either in the church or state, to claim or exercise a legislative power in relation to the doctrines, government, discipline or worship of the church. But the article under consideration also affirms that

Christ Jesus has a dominion over all created persons and things. The proof of this assertion is the testimony of Scripture. All power is given unto Christ in heaven and in earth. God has given him a name which is above every name, put all things under his feet, and left nothing which is not put under him. He has given him power over all flesh. Jesus has the keys of hell and of death. His dominion over all things is exercised for the good of his people and the punishment of his enemies. He is head over all things, "to the church;" he has power over all flesh, "that he should give eternal life to as many as the Father gave him," and that all things might "work together for good to them that love God." Such being the universal dominion of our Lord as Mediator, it follows that all intelligent beings, angels, kings, magistrates, and men of every condition, are bound to acknowledge his supremacy in their respective stations and relations.

Article XIII., "Of the Supremacy of God's Law," is: "We declare that the law of God, as written upon the heart of man, and as set forth in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is supreme in its authority and obligations; and that where the commands of the church or state are in conflict with the commands of this law, we are to obey God rather than man."

This declaration is in accordance with the Confes-

sion of Faith, Chapter I., Section 2: "Under the name of the holy Scripture, or the word of God written, are now contained all the books of the Old and New Testaments, all which are given by inspiration of God to be the rule of faith and practice." Also Chapter XX., Section 2: "God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are in anything contrary to his word, or beside it in matters of faith or worship."

This article of the Testimony is so manifestly in accordance with the word of God, that it seems to be hardly necessary to bring forward any arguments in its defence; yet the principle which it embodies has been opposed by some, and lost sight of by many. There can be no doubt that the powers that be, both in church and state, are ordained of God; therefore, obedience to civil and ecclesiastical authority is a duty. Nevertheless, there is a limit to the obedience. The authority must be lawful in itself and in its exercise, or resistance to it does not amount to resistance to the ordinance of God. Even if it is unlawful, open and violent resistance may not be a duty, for it is sometimes the duty of Christians to endure wrong and submit to oppression. But when human authority requires us to do what the law of God forbids, or forbids what the law of God

requires, it is to be disregarded, let the consequences be what they may. Upon this principle Daniel, the Hebrew children and the apostles acted with the divine approbation. The law of the land or of the church is no reason for disobeying the commands of God, for we are to obey God rather than man.

Article XIV., "Of Slaveholding," is: "We declare that slaveholding, that is, the holding of unoffending human beings in involuntary bondage, and considering and treating them as property, and subject to be bought and sold, is a violation of the law of God, and contrary both to the letter and spirit of Christianity."

The truth, here declared, is implied in the Confession of Faith, Chapter IV., Section 2: "After God had made all other creatures, he created man, male and female, with reasonable and immortal souls, endued with knowledge, righteousness and true holiness, after his own image, having the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfil it."

It seems useless to adduce arguments in support of this article of the Testimony, for the logic of events has demonstrated its truth. It might now be dropped from our standards, for the sin against which it testifies has departed from our land. Around this article some of the fiercest battles of our denomination have been fought. It seems almost incredible that less than

a quarter of a century ago there were those in the church and out of it who maintained that American slavery was in harmony with the letter and spirit of Christianity; and that the United Presbyterian Church was one of a very few that declared that slaveholding was a sin, and that those who were guilty of this sin had no right to a place in the membership of the church. It may, however, be of interest to state briefly the arguments by which this article of the Testimony was defended in those days of conflict; for these arguments will be new to the young, and they are already beginning to fade from the memory of those of mature years. (*a*) The word of God represents the whole human family as made of "one blood," and as possessing a common nature. This being the case, the natural rights of all men are the same. As slavery deprives some of their natural rights, it is at war with humanity. (*b*) The word of God, in the grant of dominion which it makes to man, limits his dominion to the lower creatures. In accordance with this grant, man may make the lower creatures his property, but if he attempts to make slaves of his fellow-men, he assumes a power which was not given him by the Lord of all. (*c*) The law of God recognizes the right of all men to use their powers of body and mind in the pursuit of happiness, but slavery de-

nies some the exercise of this right. (*d*) The law of God requires masters to give to their servants "that which is just and equal," but there is neither justice nor equality in what the slave receives from the slaveholder. (*e*) The law of God recognizes marriage as the right of all, and it teaches that this relation is indissoluble by man, but in slavery husband and wife are separated at the will of the master. (*f*) The law of God requires parents to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, but the parents of slaves are prevented from performing this duty. (*g*) The law of God commands every man to search the Scriptures, but the slaveholder forbids obedience to this command. (*h*) The law of God forbids man-stealing, but in slavery one man makes merchandise of another. These considerations show that slaveholding is contrary to the word of God; and against this sin, the United Presbyterian Church testified in those days when such a testimony was needed.

Article XV., "Of Secret Societies," is in the following language: "We declare that all associations, whether formed for political or benevolent purposes, which impose upon their members an oath of secrecy, or an obligation to obey a code of unknown laws, are inconsistent with the genius and spirit of Christianity, and church members ought not to have fellowship with such associations."

This article is in accordance with the Confession of Faith, Chapter XXII., Sections 1–3: "A lawful oath is a part of religious worship, wherein upon just occasion the person swearing solemnly calleth upon God to witness what he asserteth or promiseth; and to judge him according to the truth or falsehood of what he sweareth. The name of God only is that by which men ought to swear, and therein it is to be used with all holy fear and reverence; therefore, to swear vainly or rashly by that glorious and dreadful name, or to swear at all by any other thing, is sinful and to be abhorred. Yet in matters of weight and moment, an oath is warranted by the word of God under the New Testament, as well as under the Old; so a lawful oath being imposed by lawful authority in such matters ought to be taken. Whosoever taketh an oath ought duly to consider the weightiness of so solemn an act, and therein to avouch nothing but what he is fully persuaded is the truth. Neither may any man bind himself by oath to anything but what is good and just, and what he believeth so to be, and what he is able and resolved to perform." We will also have occasion to see that the teaching of some of the secret orders is in conflict with this statement of the Confession, Chapter XIV., Section 2: "But the principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving and resting upon Christ alone for

justification, sanctification and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace."

It is important to understand clearly what is objected to in this article of the Testimony. It is not the oath; for the oath is an ordinance of God, and its administration is sometimes proper and necessary. It is not the simple fact of secrecy. It is freely admitted that an individual may become acquainted with many things which it would be improper for him to reveal. Wisdom demands that some business, transacted in societies, corporations, and even church courts, should be kept secret. What, then, is it that this article condemns? It is the administering and taking of an oath to keep secret matters at present unknown, and to obey laws and conform to principles which may be contrary to the revealed will of God, and which we have good reason for believing are inconsistent with the divine law.

There are many secret orders, and some have more laudable objects, more solemn obligations and more erroneous doctrines than others. Therefore, all are not to be placed on precisely the same level. Those who oppose these societies believe that some are working greater injury and are worthy of severer censure than others. The orders of Freemasonry and Odd-Fellowship are the strongest; with their members we come

most frequently into contact; their doctrines and practices seem to be most objectionable; hence, in our remarks we will refer especially to them. At the same time, it should be remembered that we oppose all other associations, against which the same objections may be urged.

We might object to secret societies on social grounds, for they entice men away from their families and entangle the young in companionships which often prove their ruin; on political grounds, for they have become a great power in local and general politics; and on economical grounds, for we believe it can be demonstrated that the money paid for dues and other expenses of the lodge would yield a far larger return if invested in some other way. We might bring forward objections, founded on the administration of justice, for if the testimony of credible witnesses is to be believed, judges and juries have perverted justice because of their obligations to sympathize with and help their brethren of the same society. We might base objections on the dignity of our humanity, for the regalia, parades and ceremonies of these societies seem rather like the play of children than the work of men. Many other objections of a similar kind might be urged with greater or less force, but these objections belong rather to the reformer, the statesman, the politician and the

citizen. The Christian must have some higher and stronger reasons than these, or he will not be justified in bringing his opposition into the church. Are there such higher and stronger reasons? We believe there are; and to three of them we call attention, not because they stand alone, but because they are prominent ones and sufficient for the present purpose, and because they in some measure embrace the others.

1. We oppose secret societies *because they require a profanation of the ordinance of the oath.* That some of these societies impose an oath upon their members will not be denied. The candidate takes upon himself an obligation, sometimes in the form of an oath, and sometimes in the form of a solemn promise, administered to him by the officer of the lodge, and binds himself under severe penalties to do certain things. Now, what is an oath? It is a "declaration or promise, made by calling on God to witness what is said, with an invoking of his vengeance, or a renunciation of his favor, in case of falsehood." According to the Confession of Faith, which we assume and believe to teach the truth in this matter, an oath is to be administered only "upon just occasion;" but wherein is there any sufficient occasion for such a solemnity in so simple a thing as admitting a man into a merely human society? According to the same authority, an oath is

to be administered "with all holy fear and reverence." Though there is reason to believe that there is a lack of reverence in the administration of the oath in our courts of justice, it is to be feared that there is even less of reverence in the lodge. The Confession also asserts that the oath must be "imposed by lawful authority." Such lawful authority can be derived only from the church or state; but the lodge is neither the one nor the other. The Confession further says that whoever takes an oath should "avouch nothing but what he is fully persuaded is the truth," but how can a man be fully persuaded of the truth of laws, principles and acts of which he knows nothing? If this is a correct exhibition of the teaching of the Scriptures respecting the oath, it is evident that the administration of the oath by any merely human society is a profanation of the ordinance. It is asserted by some, who claim to know, that the oaths of some secret orders contain such sentences as these: "Whether right or wrong;" "treason and murder not excepted;" and that they bind the persons taking them to do anything required of them by the society to which they belong; but the argument under consideration does not rest upon the truth of these assertions. Admitting these charges to be untrue, the administration of an oath without sufficient occasion, without reverence, by un-

lawful authority, and without a firm persuasion of the truth, is a profanation of this ordinance of God.

If the pledge given is a solemn promise, and not a formal oath, there are objections to it of but little less weight than those which have been urged against the oath. Such an obligation is inconsistent with subjection to the law of God. This law is the supreme standard. When a man promises to keep secret the unknown transactions of any society, he does not know but that the law of God will require him to reveal them. When he binds himself to support principles with which he has not been made acquainted, he does not know but that the law of God may bind him to oppose them. When he pledges himself to obey a system of unknown laws, he does not know but that this system may be in conflict with the law of God. Therefore, in giving such a promise, he promises to do that which may involve him in sin. Such an obligation is also enslaving to the conscience. God alone is Lord of the conscience. But to promise to obey a code of unknown human laws, whatever may be its character, is doing violence to the freedom of the conscience. It is a deliberate renunciation of the God-given right of private judgment. It is making ourselves the servants of men.

This is one reason for believing that secret societies

"are inconsistent with the genius and spirit of Christianity." If they impose an oath upon their members, they profane an ordinance of God. If they require a solemn promise concerning things which are unknown, they require that which is inconsistent with subjection to the law of God, and enslaving to the conscience.

2. We oppose secret societies *because they despise the church of God.* It is asserted by those who believe in the wisdom and value of these societies that they are intended and employed to accomplish certain good ends. It is claimed that they are designed to promote, and that they do promote, love, benevolence and morality. The correctness of this claim might be disputed. It might be said that their brotherly love is restricted in its exercise, for they will not receive into their membership sick and infirm men, or helpless women; that their benevolence is no greater than that of life insurance companies, for they give only to those who contribute to their funds; and that their success in teaching morality is not very marked, for the companions and associations of the lodge have ruined many. But let us grant that everything which the advocates of these orders claim for them is true; let us admit that these societies do promote brotherly love, increase benevolence and cultivate morality. These are among the things which God designed to accomplish by the

church which he has established in the world. He has commanded its members to love one another, to assist the poor, not only of their own number, but throughout the world, as they may have opportunity, and to live lives of holiness. No one who is acquainted with the teaching of the Scriptures will question the truth of these statements. If this is so, what is the meaning of the conduct of those who establish and maintain human societies to do that which God intended to be done by his church? It is an open declaration that they are wiser than God; that the church cannot accomplish what it was intended to accomplish; and that, instead of establishing a church with its constitution, officers and ordinances, God should have established a lodge with its rites and ceremonies. This is despising the church; for those who refuse to connect themselves with the church, who neglect or profane its ordinances, and who try to accomplish in any other way what God intended to be accomplished by his church, are all guilty of this sin. That it is a sin, and an aggravated sin, to despise the church, no one who believes in its divine appointment will deny. And because secret societies claim to do that which God intended to be done by his church, we maintain that they "are inconsistent with the genius and spirit of Christianity," for in this claim they despise the church and its King and Head.

3. We oppose secret societies *because they teach a false religion.* This is a serious charge, and if it can be proven, no consistent Christian will have anything to do with these societies. What is true religion? Its fundamental doctrines are these: there is a God; men are sinners; there is but one Mediator between God and man, the Lord Jesus Christ; there is a place of future rewards; the only way of reconciliation with God and of securing everlasting happiness is by faith in Christ. On these points all who believe the revelations of the Bible are agreed. Any system of religion which omits one of these fundamental principles, or teaches a doctrine contrary to one of these fundamental principles, must be a false religion.

Does any secret order teach religion? If so, does any one teach a false religion? In attempting to answer these questions, we must make our appeal to recognized authorities. It will not do to rest our answer upon the testimony of individual members, for they may be ignorant or mistaken. In determining, for example, what are the principles of the United Presbyterian Church, we must appeal, not to the belief and practice of individuals, but to the acknowledged standards. Now, there are recognized authorities in these secret orders. There are books which have received the endorsement of these societies, which lay

down their principles, and which can be purchased by any one who desires. Among these books are Webb's Freemason's Monitor, Carson's Monitor of the Ancient and Accepted Rite, Mackey's Manual of the Lodge, Grosch's Manual of Odd-Fellowship, Town's System of Speculative Masonry, Sickles' Ahiman Rezon, etc.

Appealing to these recognized standards, let us attempt to answer the question, do these secret societies teach religion? We read of altars; and altars are peculiar to religion. Their presence in any institution is evidence of its religious character. We read of chaplains, grand chaplains, right worthy grand chaplains; of priests, high priests, most excellent high priests; of prelates and most excellent prelates. All these are religious officers, and it is their special business to attend to matters of religion. We, therefore, infer that these societies teach religion; for if not, what room would there be in them for altars, priests and prelates? But we are not left to inference. The acknowledged authorities, already referred to, speak plainly on this point. "The meeting of a Masonic lodge is strictly a religious ceremony," Webb's Lexicon, page 357. "As morality is the great doctrine of the apprentice, and science the great purpose of the craft, so religion, of a broad and universal character,

is the prime inculcation of the master's degree," Webb's Lexicon, page 344. "All our regulations assume, as a foundation that cannot be moved, a belief in the being of a God, and a future state of rewards and punishments, and cultivate the necessity of moral purity as a qualification for future happiness; and this, according to our definitions, forms the sum and substance of religion in its most universal acceptation," Mackey's Mystic Tie, page 85. "The explanations of the symbols of the order, given in this degree, are worthy of your attention and remembrance; especially as presented in three great divisions, teaching our duty to God, to our fellow-men and to ourselves," Grosch's Manual, page 369. "The right of induction, therefore, signifies the end of a profane and vicious life, the new birth of corrupted human nature, the death of vice and all bad passions, and the introduction into the new life of purity and virtue. It also prepares the candidate, by prayer and meditation, for that mystic pilgrimage, where he must wander through night and darkness, before he can behold the golden splendors of the Orient, and stand in unfettered freedom among the sons of light," Sickles' Ahiman Rezon, page 54. "We now behold man complete in morality and intelligence, with the stay of religion added to insure him of the protection of the Deity, and guard him against

ever going astray. These three degrees form a perfect and harmonious whole, nor can we conceive of anything that can be suggested more, which the soul of man requires," Sickles' Ahiman Rezon, page 188. "In advancing to the fourth degree, the Mason is assured of his election and final salvation. Hence opens the fifth degree, where he discovers his election to, and his glorified station in, the kingdom of his Father," Town's System, page 170. "Masonry is a religious institution. The Mason on the night of his initiation commences the great task which, in his future Masonic life, is never to be discontinued, of erecting in his heart a spiritual temple for the indwelling of God," Mackey's Manual, pages 40, 41.

It is evident from these quotations that these societies teach religion. What is the religion taught by them? Is it true or false? It is a religion which ignores and denies the Lord Jesus Christ. In proof of this assertion, we appeal again to the testimony of acknowledged authorities. It is the boast of these orders that in them men of all nations and religions can meet on the same level, and unite in the same worship. Both Webb and Sickles say that, in the lodge, "the distant Chinese, the wild Arab and the American savage will embrace a brother Briton, Frank or German." What is the religion of such a brotherhood as

this? "Though in ancient times Masons were charged in every country to be of the religion of that country or nation, whatever it was, it is now thought more expedient only to oblige them to that religion in which all men agree," Mackey's Manual, page 216. Evidently, that religion "in which all men agree" cannot be the Christian religion. The lodge must ignore the Lord Jesus Christ, or the Jew and the Mahometan could not unite in its worship. "The descendants of Abraham, the diverse followers of Jesus, the pariahs of the stricter sects, are gathered around the same altar as one family, manifesting no difference of creed or worship; they have left their prejudices at the door," Grosch's Manual, page 285. "A belief in God constitutes the sole creed of the Mason, at least the only creed he is required to profess," Mackey's Manual, page 40. Accordingly, in the prayers and hymns, which are given in their rituals of worship, the name of the Saviour is omitted. How can any Christian unite in such prayers, inasmuch as Jesus himself has said, "No man cometh to the Father, but by me?" The name of Christ is also expunged from the selections of Scripture which are read in the lodge. It is written in the word, "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks unto God and the Father by him." Therefore, those insti-

tutions which boast of their religion and worship in which all men can agree, and which ignore the Saviour in their prayers and other religious exercises, teach a false religion, for it is a religion which denies the only Mediator between God and man.

These societies also teach that salvation is secured by good works. "White is emblematic of that purity of life and rectitude of conduct by which alone we may expect to gain admission into the Holy of Holies above," Sickles' Ahiman Rezon, page 63. "We may be received into thine everlasting kingdom, and there enjoy the just reward of a pious and virtuous life," Mackey's Manual, page 203. "The Divine Being views no moral character in a man with greater complacency than his who, in heart, strictly conforms to Masonic requirements," Town's System, page 184. And in the burial service, the members of these societies, no matter what their faith may have been, are spoken of as "transferred by death from their work in this lodge and life to the lodge and life above." In all these authorities, repentance towards God, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and the sanctification of the Spirit, are not so much as hinted at as needful to salvation. But the word of God asserts that men are justified by faith, and not by the deeds of the law. Therefore, that religion which teaches that salvation is by works, and

"the just reward of a pious and virtuous life," is a false religion.

For these reasons, among others, the United Presbyterian Church testifies that these secret societies "are inconsistent with the genius and spirit of Christianity," and that church members ought not to have fellowship with them.

Article XVI., "Of Communion," is: "We declare that the church should not extend communion, in sealing ordinances, to those who refuse adherence to her profession, or subjection to her government and discipline, or who refuse to forsake a communion which is inconsistent with the profession that she makes; nor should communion in any ordinance of worship be held under such circumstances as would be inconsistent with the keeping of these ordinances pure and entire, or so as to give countenance to any corruption of the doctrines and institutions of Christ."

The teaching of the Confession of Faith on this subject is as follows, Chapter XXVI., Sections 1, 2: "All saints that are united to Jesus Christ their head by his Spirit and by faith, have fellowship with him in his graces, sufferings, death, resurrection and glory. And being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and

private, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man. Saints, by profession, are bound to maintain a holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God, and in performing such other spiritual services as tend to their mutual edification, as also relieving each other in outward things, according to their several abilities and necessities. Which communion, as God offereth opportunity, is to be extended unto all those who in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus."

This article of the Testimony has two parts. The first has reference to communion in sealing ordinances; the second has reference to communion in all the ordinances of worship. These two parts will be considered separately.

It is to be observed that the Confession does not answer directly the question, Who are to be admitted to the sealing ordinances of the church? It is not speaking distinctly of communion in sealing ordinances, but of the general subject of the communion of the saints, which includes all their mutual duties, such as the relieving of "each other in outward things, according to their several abilities and necessities." It states the great doctrine that Christians in different lands should cultivate towards each other a holy fellowship, and not suffer their mutual love to be

restricted by geographical boundaries or national distinctions. It certainly is true that fellowship in sealing ordinances is a part of the communion of the saints; but in interpreting the language of the Confession of Faith, we must take into consideration the design of the Assembly that framed it. That design was confessedly to effect, in the three kingdoms, a uniformity in doctrine, worship and government. It was hoped that all the churches represented in the Westminster Assembly would be brought together into one church. This hope gave color to the declarations of the Confession. The chapter on "The Communion of the Saints" did not anticipate different denominations, holding to different creeds, but a united church. Therefore, since the circumstances of the church are very different from what the Westminster divines expected, it is necessary to give a more clear and explicit answer than they did to the question, Who are to be admitted to sealing ordinances in the church? The answer of our Testimony to this question is, in substance, this: The church should extend such communion only to those who adhere to its profession and are subject to its government. We believe this answer to be in accordance with the statements of the Confession, already quoted. While holy fellowship should be cultivated and practised with all believers, communion

in sealing ordinances should be restricted to those who agree in doctrine, worship and government, for such agreement was contemplated and designed by those who prepared the Confession of Faith.

The sealing ordinances of the New Testament church are Baptism and the Lord's Supper. They are called *sealing* ordinances because they seal the benefits, purchased by Christ, to true believers. As a seal affixed to a deed is an evidence of its authenticity, so these ordinances are an evidence that those who partake of them have a right to the blessings of the covenant of grace. Some churches invite all persons who believe themselves to be Christians to commune with them in the sealing ordinance of the Lord's Supper; others invite all who know themselves to be members of evangelical churches, in good and regular standing. In opposition to these latitudinarian views, our Testimony asserts that the church should not extend communion in sealing ordinances to those who refuse adherence to its profession or subjection to its authority; in other words, to those who are not its members. Several reasons might be assigned in support of the correctness of this position, but we will select two, which are easily understood, and which will show that this article of the Testimony rests on a substantial foundation.

The responsibility of the Session to the King and

Head of the church requires that communion in sealing ordinances be restricted to those whom they know and who are under their jurisdiction. It is now taken for granted that the Presbyterian form of church government is "agreeable to and founded on the word of God," and that the Session is a divinely appointed court in the Presbyterian order. What is the duty of Sessions? They are charged with the government of the congregations; it belongs to them to inquire into the knowledge, character and conduct of the members, to exercise discipline when it is needed, and to promote the good order and purity of the church. If they do not do this, the Saviour, whose officers they are, will hold them responsible for the injury and dishonor which their ignorance and carelessness may bring upon the church. How can they do this, if they do not know who are admitted to sealing ordinances? How can they do this, if they admit to these ordinances those who are not under their jurisdiction, and on whom they can exercise no discipline? Therefore, every Session must say to those who are not members of their congregation, We do not deny your Christianity; but you are strangers to us, and we have no authority to inquire into the correctness of your faith and the holiness of your life; and the solemn obligations we have taken to maintain the order and purity

of the church will not suffer us to permit you, on your own responsibility, to take part in these sealing ordinances. Of course, every man is responsible to God for his faith and practice; but the Session is also responsible for the faith and practice of those whom they admit to the place of disciples. If the individual alone was responsible, there would be no use for a Session. But Sessions have a responsibility in this matter which cannot be laid aside; and, because of their responsibility, they ought not to extend communion in sealing ordinances to any one whose life and faith are unknown to them, and who is not subject to their spiritual authority.

The proper exercise of necessary discipline requires the same restriction. That the exercise of discipline is a part of the duty of the church, no believer in the New Testament will deny. Every church finds it necessary to arraign, try and sentence its unworthy members. To do this in a particular congregation is, according to Presbyterian polity, the province of the Session of that congregation. But a Session has no power to fine or imprison offenders; all it can do is to suspend or excommunicate them, and thus refuse to extend to them communion in sealing ordinances. Now, if a Session permits any one, on his own responsibility, to partake of the sacrament of the Lord's

Supper, how can its discipline be enforced? Instances like the following have occurred: Men have been suspended in one congregation for error in doctrine or immorality in life; they have immediately united with some other congregation, less strict in faith and practice; and then they have returned and communed with the congregation from whose membership they had been suspended. The Session of the first congregation inflicted the censure of the church upon these men, but its loose views on the subject of communion made its discipline of no effect. It said that these men were not worthy members of the church, but it could not keep them from the sealing ordinances; it could not enforce its own sentence. No Session can exercise such discipline as the word of God requires, unless it restricts communion in sealing ordinances to those who are under its jurisdiction.

For these reasons, among others, we declare that "the church should not extend communion in sealing ordinances to those who refuse adherence to its profession, or subjection to its government and discipline, or who refuse to forsake a communion which is inconsistent with the profession that it makes." To this general rule there may be exceptions. Members of other congregations in the same denomination, or of congregations in a different denomination, may be kept

for a time by the providence of God within the bounds of some congregation, and may regularly worship with it. They may feel that it is a duty and privilege to unite with it in the observance of the Lord's Supper. If so, they should make their case known to the Session of that congregation; and that Session, if convinced of the sincerity of their motives, the uprightness of their life and the reality of their profession, may extend to them the desired privilege. Every such case must be decided upon its own merits. Sessions must exercise their discretion, and be responsible to the church and its Lord for the manner in which they exercise it. This is in accordance with the deliverance of the highest court of the church. In 1868 a memorial was presented to the General Assembly, asking certain modifications in the Sixteenth Article of the Testimony, "so as to concede to Sessions the authority of applying the principles of it as their own discretion may direct." In answer to this memorial, the Assembly took the following action: "This authority Sessions already possess. It is supposed that Sessions are composed of men of understanding, and that they are acquainted with the principles which they have embraced; and they must, of course, exercise their discretion in the application of these principles as cases may occur. Sessions, of course, are responsible for the manner in

which they exercise this discretion; but the right to exercise it is unquestionable. . . . The Sixteenth Article of our Testimony lays down the general rule on the subject of communion by which the church is to be governed in all ordinary cases. It was not designed to make provision for cases of an extraordinary nature. When cases of this kind occur, Sessions, in the exercise of a wise discretion, must dispose of them as may be for the peace and edification of the church."

The second part of the article of the Testimony under discussion refers to communion in the ordinances of worship, whether sealing or not, and forbids such communion in any circumstances which would be inconsistent with the keeping of these ordinances pure and entire. Some deny the deity of the Lord Jesus; and to commune with them in any act of worship would be a denial of him through whom alone we can come to the Father, and a partaking of their sin. Some, who claim the Christian name, pray to images; and to commune with them in their prayers would be to give countenance to idolatry. Some preach errors in doctrine; and to listen to their teaching gives countenance to their error, and endangers our own souls. Against such fellowship as this the church testifies in the article before us. Such testimony is manifestly

right. Christ has taught certain doctrines and appointed certain institutions; and if we do anything to corrupt these doctrines and institutions, or to encourage those who corrupt them, we are not faithful to the Master whom we profess to serve, or to the church whose principles we believe to be founded on the revealed will of God.

This is the teaching of the Testimony on the subject of the communion of the saints. While we believe that all Christians should cultivate toward each other a holy fellowship in such spiritual and temporal services as tend to their mutual edification, we also believe that communion in sealing ordinances should, in ordinary cases, be extended only to those who are members of the congregation in which they are observed, and that communion in any ordinance of worship should never be extended in circumstances which would give countenance to any corruption of the ordinances and institutions of Christ.

Article XVII., "Of Covenanting," is: "We declare that public social covenanting is a moral duty, the observance of which is not required at stated times, but on extraordinary occasions, as the providence of God and the circumstances of the church may indicate. It is seasonable in time of great danger to the church, in times of exposure to backsliding, or in times of refor-

mation, when the church is returning to God from a state of backsliding. When the church has entered into such covenant transactions, they continue to bind posterity faithfully to adhere to and prosecute the grand object for which such engagements have been entered into."

This declaration is in harmony with the Confession of Faith, Chapter XXII., Sections 5–7: "A vow is of a like nature of a promissory oath, and ought to be made with the like religious care, and to be performed with the like faithfulness. It is not to be made to any creature, but to God alone; and, that it may be accepted, it is to be made voluntarily, out of faith, and conscience of duty, in way of thankfulness for mercy received, or for the obtaining of what we want; whereby we may more strictly bind ourselves to necessary duties, or to other things, so far and so long as they may fitly conduce thereto. No man may vow to do anything forbidden in the word of God, or what would hinder any duty therein commanded, or which is not in his own power, and for the performance whereof he hath no promise or ability from God."

When believers unite with the church, they enter into a public covenant with God. God says to them, "I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people;" they take God as their God, and promise to

perform those duties which are enjoined on them in his word. In addition to this, the Scriptures authorize the church to enter into covenant with God on special occasions, by a formal and solemn deed. Again and again, the Old Testament church, with the approbation of God, "made a covenant before the Lord to walk after the Lord, and to keep his commandments, his testimonies and his statutes, with all their heart and with all their soul." We learn from these examples that the duty of covenanting is not a stated, but an extraordinary one. It is to be performed only in peculiar circumstances. God's people are called to it in times of special danger, or of unusual awakening and reformation. When the providences of God lead a congregation or a church to engage in this solemn duty, the covenant into which they enter is, in some respects, binding on posterity. This is evident from the divine dealings with the children of Israel, who are repeatedly charged with breaking the covenant which had been made with their fathers. The principle here recognized is not peculiar to covenanting. It is acted on in all corporate or organized bodies, whether civil or ecclesiastical. An act of any society is not annulled by the death of the members who originally passed it; the act remains in force till it is regularly repealed. The same principle is recognized by the church in the binding obligation of its covenants.

In observing the duty of social covenanting, a covenant is prepared which sets forth the reasons for engaging in this duty, confesses the sins of the people, and pledges them to greater faithfulness in duty. On the day appointed, after appropriate exercises of public worship, each covenanter lifts his right hand, as in taking an oath, while the covenant is read, and then signs his name to the covenant to which he has sworn. And the Testimony asserts that, on extraordinary occasions, it may be the duty of the church, or of a congregation of the church, to make such a public and formal covenant.

Article XVIII., "Of Psalmody," is: "We declare that it is the will of God that the songs contained in the Book of Psalms be sung in his worship, both public and private, to the end of the world; and in singing God's praise, these songs should be employed to the exclusion of the devotional compositions of uninspired men."

This declaration is in accordance with the teaching of the Confession of Faith, Chapter XXI., Sections 1, 5: "The acceptable way of worshiping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will that he may not be worshiped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation,

or in any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scriptures. The reading of the Scriptures with godly fear, the sound preaching and conscionable hearing of the word, in obedience unto God, with understanding, faith and reverence, singing of psalms with grace in the heart, as also the due administration and worthy receiving of the sacraments instituted by Christ, are all parts of the ordinary religious worship of God."

We believe that this declaration of the Testimony, though its truth is denied by many, is in harmony not only with the Confession of Faith, but also with the word of God. We will not attempt an exhaustive discussion of the important question: What should be sung in the praise of God? We will briefly state the line of argument by which we reach the conclusion that it is the will of God that the inspired Psalms should be sung in his worship, to the exclusion of all other devotional compositions. We will not attempt to answer the objections which are urged against this position; for if the doctrine of the Testimony can be proven to be true and founded on the word of God, it is evident that all objections, however plausible they may be, will not overthrow the truth.

1. That book of the Bible which is called the Psalms is inspired. No extended argument in support of this proposition is necessary. It is laid down only because

it prepares the way for subsequent propositions. The Book of Psalms has always been received as a part of the inspired canon. No one has ever called in question the place it occupies in the Holy Scriptures. All the Psalms were not composed by David. Some were written by Asaph, some by Solomon, and some by others, but the authors were all inspired; and by some inspired hand their writings were collected into one book, and arranged in the order in which they now stand. As thus collected and arranged, they are called the Psalms of David, not because he is the author of them all, but because he is the author of the most of them, and because he is justly regarded as the leading psalmist of the church. If these Psalms have a right to the place they occupy in the divine word, they must be inspired, for "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God." And they have received peculiar sanction in the New Testament. There is no other part of the Old Testament which is so often quoted by our Lord and his apostles. They refer again and again to the words of David to prove the deity of Jesus of Nazareth, to show the necessity of his sufferings, and to illustrate and express their own experiences. Some have questioned the inspiration of the Pentateuch and of the historical books of the Bible; some have questioned the inspiration of the prophets; but none have

questioned the inspiration of the Psalter, save those who deny the fact of inspiration altogether. If any part of the Old Testament is inspired, that part is the Psalms of David.

2. The inspired Psalms alone were divinely appointed to be used in singing praise to God. The truth of this proposition may be established from the fact that David is called "the Psalmist of Israel." When David, near the end of his life, looked back over all he had been able to do for the glory of the heavenly Father, he rejoiced, not in his own kingly dignity, or in the decisive victories he had gained over his enemies, or in the prosperity of his kingdom, but in the fact that he had been raised up, through divine grace, to be the psalmist of the church: "Now these be the last words of David. David, the son of Jesse, said, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob and the sweet Psalmist of Israel, said: The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue." As an inspired teacher was one whose great work it was to teach the church; as an inspired prophet was one whose great work it was to deliver prophecies for the church; so an inspired psalmist was one whose great work it was to write for the church devotional compositions to be sung in the worship of God. If, then, the Lord raised up David

to be the Psalmist of Israel, it was to the intent that the Psalms he penned should be used by Israel in the worship of their God.

That the Psalms were given by divine appointment to be used in singing praise to God, is also evident from the fact that they have been, under divine direction, collected into a book by themselves. They were written by different authors at various times; some of them are to be found in other portions of the Old Testament; but they have all been arranged in one book, which is called the Book of Psalms. There must have been some purpose in this. What was this purpose? What could it have been, except that these Psalms were adapted to the worship of the church, and that they were designed and collected to be used by the church in its worship?

This conclusion is confirmed by the matter and structure of the Psalms. They are full of praise to God for what he is in himself, and for his wonderful works in creation, providence and redemption. They are written in the peculiar style of Hebrew poetry, so that they could be sung or chanted. And this conclusion is still further confirmed by the acknowledged fact that the Psalms were used by the Jewish Church in the worship of God. No mention is made, by either inspired or uninspired writers, of any other. In the

temple and in the synagogue, down to the time of the incarnation, and ever since, they have been chanted by the children of faithful Abraham. Their joys and their sorrows, their hopes and their fears, their longings and their gratitude, have all found expression in the words of the sweet psalmist of their nation.

But the truth of the proposition, that the Psalms alone were given to the Jews to be used in singing praise to God, will be admitted by all. Even those who assert that the Psalms are not adapted to the spirit of Christianity, will readily grant that they were adapted to the Jewish economy, and that they alone were appointed to be sung in the Jewish Church.

3. The divine appointment for the exclusive use of the inspired Psalms in singing praise to God has never been repealed. We search the Old Testament in vain for any hint of such a repeal. Again and again are the people of God commanded to sing Psalms unto him, but there is no intimation that anything else is to be used in his praise. When we turn to the New Testament, we cannot fail to notice their unbroken silence on this point. The priesthood of Aaron has given place to the priesthood of Christ; the sacrifices and ceremonies of the temple have been abolished; but there is no change in the ordinance of singing Psalms in the worship of God. The apostle James says: "Is

any merry? Let him sing Psalms;" and he refers, without doubt, to the Psalms of inspiration. When the Saviour commands us to "search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life," what Scriptures does he mean? Manifestly the inspired Scriptures. So, when James commands us to "sing Psalms," it is evident, from the same course of reasoning, that he means the inspired Psalms.

But it is said that the singing of hymns is also enjoined in the New Testament. If this is so, and if by hymns are meant the devotional compositions of uninspired men, then the divine appointment for the exclusive use of the Psalms in the worship of God has been repealed. Let us examine the passages in which, it is asserted, the use of uninspired hymns is commanded. We are told that when our Lord and his apostles had observed the last passover and the first supper, they "sung an hymn," and "went out into the mount of Olives." What was the "hymn" which they sung? It must be remembered that Jesus and his disciples kept the passover in all respects as the Jews were accustomed to keep it; and that the Jews, in keeping the passover, sung that portion of the psalter which is called the Hallel, that is, Psalms cxiii. and cxviii. inclusive. But they did not sing the whole Hallel at once; they began the passover by chanting

the first verses of Psalm cxiii., and they so interspersed the services with singing that the feast was concluded with the last words of Psalm cxviii. We may, therefore, conclude that the hymn which Jesus and his apostles sung as they went out to the mount of Olives at the conclusion of the passover, was the last verses of the Hallel. To this conclusion there are few biblical critics who take exception. Farrar says: "The hymn, which was sung before the departure of the little company to Gethsemane, has with great probability been supposed to be the second part of the great Hallel." Geikie says: "Now, at the close, the voices of the eldest of them chanted with slow, solemn strains the remainder of the Hallel, and the rest responded with the word hallelujah at the close of each verse. The anthem began fitly: 'Not unto us, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy and for thy truth's sake;' and closed with the words of Psalm cxviii., 'Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord.' Now all was over, and the eleven, following their Master, went out into the night. They were on their way to Gethsemane." This passage, then, does not authorize the use of uninspired compositions in singing praise to God.

To prove that the exclusive use of an inspired Psalmody is not enjoined upon the New Testament

church, we are sometimes referred to Ephesians v. 19: "Speaking to yourselves in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;" and to Colossians iii. 16: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." If the hymns and spiritual songs were different from psalms, and if such hymns and spiritual songs were used in the early church, it is remarkable that not one of them has been preserved. Albert Barnes says, and no one can accuse him of undue partiality for the exclusive use of an inspired Psalmody: "The presumption is very strong that, if there had been such hymns, they would have been preserved with as much care as the Epistles, or the Psalms themselves." But there is no evidence that the hymns and spiritual songs were anything different from psalms. A psalm is a hymn, and a hymn is a spiritual song. In the titles prefixed to the Psalms some are called "psalms," and some "songs," and there are in the original several words which are translated "psalms." Hebrew scholars are not agreed as to the exact difference in the meaning of these different words, but the translators of the Septuagint have rendered them by the terms, "psalms," "hymns," "odes,"

or spiritual songs. Hence, these terms passed into common use among those who were familiar with the Septuagint, not to describe different Psalters, but different parts of the same Psalter. This is, no doubt, the sense in which Paul used these terms in the texts referred to; for the Septuagint was the version of the Old Testament which was generally used by those to whom he was writing, and in the same connection he exhorts them to "let the *word of Christ* dwell in you richly." As if he had said: "Teach and admonish one another by using the various psalms, hymns and spiritual songs in the Book of Psalms, which is a part of the inspired word of Christ." These passages, then, do not repeal the divine appointment for the exclusive use of the inspired Psalms in the praise of God. On the other hand, they expressly enjoin their use; for no other Psalmody can be called with equal propriety "the word of Christ." If these passages do not repeal the divine appointment, there is no other passage in the New Testament which does, and that appointment still stands.

4. If the divine appointment for the exclusive use of the Psalms has never been repealed, they alone are yet to be sung in the worship of God. One great principle which underlies the ordinances of worship is thus expressed in our Shorter Catechism: "The second

commandment forbiddeth the worshiping of God by images, or in any other way *not appointed in his word;*" or as it is stated in the Confession of Faith, "in any other way *not prescribed in the Holy Scriptures.*" This is but another form of expressing the truth, which the Saviour announced when he said: "In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." Therefore, in deciding whether anything may be used in the worship of God, the question is not, is it forbidden? but, is it commanded? It might be affirmed that wine should be used in the administration of baptism, and in support of this affirmation it might be said that wine has never been forbidden. A sufficient reply would be: It is true, wine has never been forbidden, but it has never been commanded; it is nowhere said, thou shalt not baptize with wine, but it is said, thou shalt baptize with water. So, if it is said that the use of uninspired hymns has never been forbidden, we reply: It is true, they have never been forbidden, but they have never been commanded; it is not said, thou shalt not sing uninspired hymns, but it is said, thou shalt sing Psalms.

An ordinance of God must remain in force till God repeals it. The ordinance of sacrifice was enjoined upon the Jewish church, and sacrifices were offered till the coming of Christ, who "offered himself once for all."

Since that time there remains "no more sacrifice for sin." So it was with the Sabbath. The seventh day of the week continued to be the Sabbath until God, by the example and teaching of the apostles, repealed the original appointment, and the first day of the week became the Christian Sabbath. So it is with the Psalms. The ordinance of God for their use must remain in force until it is repealed. But it has not yet been repealed; therefore, the Psalms alone are still to be used in the worship of God.

This line of argument brings us to the conclusion, that it is the will of God that the songs contained in the Book of Psalms should be sung in his worship to the end of the world, to the exclusion of the devotional compositions of uninspired men.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CONCLUSION.

To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.—*Heb.* iii. 15.

IT now remains only to apply and enforce the principles which have been stated, illustrated and established in the preceding chapters. If the conclusions we have reached are in harmony with the Holy Scriptures, what is our present duty? A religious duty is something enjoined on us by God. If we believe that God is, and that he is the rewarder of those who diligently seek him, we ought not to hesitate in obeying his commandments. What are his commandments? They are to be found in his word. However, in speaking of our duty, we will not attempt to go over the whole field; we will refer only to those duties which are immediately connected with the doctrines we have been considering. These duties are summed up in the words which David first penned, and which are quoted again and again in the New Testament, "To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts."

THE COMMANDMENT OF GOD.

1. God commands us *to believe in Christ.* "This is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment." Every one who is acquainted with the New Testament knows that this commandment is repeated, directly or indirectly, on almost every page. Therefore, our first duty is to believe. Of course, there are other duties which are connected with faith, such as a study of the Scriptures, repentance and prayer; but faith is the foundation on which they all rest. It is to be observed and remembered that faith is our duty, because it is commanded. Many seem to think that the words, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," are only an invitation, which we are at liberty to accept or reject. But this is a mistaken notion. They are a commandment, which has the same divine sanction as any precept of the Decalogue, and which we cannot disobey with impunity. Have you obeyed this commandment? Have you accepted Christ as your Saviour? If you have, you are in the right path; if not, this is your present duty. This is the first step; and till this is taken, no other is possible. This is the reason why, in the word of God and in the preaching of the gospel, immediate faith is so often insisted on. If you would obey God's command-

ment, if you would be able to perform the other duties of the Christian life, if you would be saved, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ."

2. God commands us *to confess our faith in Christ.* "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." When a man has accepted Christ as his Saviour, his duty is not ended; he must show his faith by a public profession. Such a profession is necessary to his well-being; for it will shield him from many temptations, inspire him with faithfulness, and strengthen his graces. It is also necessary for the good of others; for if a man refuses to number himself with the friends of Jesus, he will be counted with the enemies. It matters not what he may say in favor of the Saviour and the Christian religion, the influence of his example will be more powerful than the influence of his words. Therefore, God has commanded all believers to make confession of their faith. While such a confession is to be made by a holy life, it is especially to be made by a consistent membership in the church of Christ. Christ has organized a church on earth, and he calls on his disciples to be a peculiar people, separate from the world. Hence, a man's second duty is to unite with the visible church, and thus confess his faith before men.

But the visible church is divided into many different denominations; and no sooner is a man convinced that it is his commanded duty to connect himself with the church, than he is met with the question: With what denomination of the church ought I to unite? The design of several of the preceding chapters has been to give assistance in answering this question. All evangelical churches believe the Scriptures to be the word of God and the only rule of faith and practice, but they do not all understand the Scriptures in the same way. Therefore, each church finds it necessary to prepare a creed, which is a brief statement of what the church believes to be the teaching of the word of God, and to which all its members are required to assent. We have explained the Presbyterian form of church government, and have proven that it, and not Episcopacy or Congregationalism, is agreeable to and founded on the divine word. We have considered the Westminster Confession of Faith, the common creed of the English-speaking Presbyterian churches, and have shown that it is a correct statement of the doctrines of revelation as contained in the Holy Scriptures. We, therefore, came to the conclusion that the Presbyterian Church was more scriptural than any other, and that the believer should confess his faith by a union with some branch of this church.

We were then met by another difficulty. The Presbyterian Church is broken up into several denominations, holding to the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Catechisms Larger and Shorter, but differing on certain matters of minor importance. The question to be answered was this: With which of these denominations ought we to connect ourselves? For it is evident that it is our duty to unite with that denomination whose faith and practice are nearest the Scripture standard. To assist in answering this question, we considered the Testimony of the United Presbyterian Church, which contains in eighteen articles a brief statement of the belief of the church on as many different points, on which the Westminster Confession of Faith seems to be deficient in clearness and explicitness; and we showed that each of these articles was in harmony with the teaching of the word of God. If our reasoning was correct, we are brought to the conclusion that it is our duty to unite with the United Presbyterian Church, because the creed of this church is more in accordance with the infallible standard, than that of any other church.

The divisions of the visible church are to be regretted. They are evidence of the weakness, blindness and sinfulness of our fallen nature. It is a shame that those who have been redeemed by the Lord Jesus are not

one. Nevertheless, in this respect as in every other, God overrules the wrath of man and makes it to praise him. The differences of opinion with reference to the teachings of inspiration have led Christians to be more watchful against error, and to be more diligent in investigating the truth. The divisions in the church have silenced many excuses. No believer in the Bible can refuse to unite with the church, on the ground that he cannot accept its creed; for there are creeds enough to express every man's views. While we labor and pray that the time may soon come when all Christians will be brought to see eye to eye, we are at the same time to rejoice that God is able to overrule the divisions in his church for his own glory and the good of his people.

It is the duty of every believer to show his faith by a union with the church. In the present divided state of the church, it is the duty of every believer to examine the creeds of the different denominations, and to connect himself with the one whose creed is the best expression of the teaching of the Holy Scriptures, as he understands them. This is our second duty, viz.: to confess our faith before men by a union with that branch of the visible church whose subordinate standards are most agreeable to the word of God.

3. God commands us *to believe in Christ, and confess*

our faith at once. "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth;" "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness;" "To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." All God's commands relate to the present. He gives no commandments about the future. He tells us to believe, repent and confess, not to-morrow, but to-day.

It is an unquestioned fact that faith and salvation are inseparably connected. If we believe, we will be saved; if we do not believe, we will be lost. And salvation is an important matter. It includes all happiness for the present and the future. Since these things are so, when should the duty of faith be performed? It will not do to wait till death has come. The word of God teaches us that there is no opportunity for faith and repentance after the soul leaves the body. There is no intermediate state between this world and the next, in which the departed spirit can prepare to meet its God. "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it." If any man needed to pass through an intermediate state to prepare him for heaven, that man was the dying thief, who had lived a life of open lawlessness; but the Saviour said to him, "To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." Faith is a duty which must be performed before death, if it is

performed at an; and as death may come at any moment, it should be performed now.

It is not safe to postpone this duty till the last sickness comes. There may be no last sickness; death may come in a moment. Or if there is a sickness, the sick one may be unconscious through it all. Or if there is consciousness, he may be deceived as to the nature and result of his illness. Oh! the deceptions men practise in the sick-rooms of earth. Friends tarry at the door to wipe the tears from their eyes, so that the dying one may feel no alarm. They talk of journeys in pursuit of health, when they know that the only journey the sick one will take is along the road to the cemetery. They talk of the coming summer and the strength it will bring, when they know that the summer's flowers will bloom over the sick one's grave. They talk of dresses, when they know that the sick one's shroud has already been made. Others have been deceived in this way, and so may we. If we are conscious during our last sickness, and if we fully realize that the end is approaching, we will have enough to do without having to make our peace with God. Anxiety about the future, the sorrow of friends, and the sad farewells will occupy our attention. If we could not overcome our doubts and fears when body and mind were in full vigor, how can we hope to overcome them

in that hour of weakness? If Satan was too powerful for us in the days of our strength, how can we expect to gain the victory over him when heart and flesh faint and fail? "If thou hast run with footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? If in the land of peace wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?"

It is not safe to postpone this duty of faith till to-morrow. If we put off repentance another day, we have a day more to repent of, and a day less to repent in. He who has promised pardon on our repentance, has not promised to preserve our lives till we repent. Life is so uncertain that our important interests demand our immediate attention. Even if we should live for many years, the affairs of this world are so absorbing that every year lessens the probability of our conversion. If it is a duty to believe in Christ, it is a present duty; if it is a duty to confess our faith by a union with the church, it is a duty which should be performed at once; for God "limiteth a certain day, saying, To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts."

THIS COMMANDMENT OF GOD IS MADE KNOWN BY MANY MESSENGERS.

Some may say: God has never commanded me to believe and confess to-day. It is true, God does not now speak to men in an audible voice from heaven, as he sometimes did in former days; but he sends his messengers who speak in his name and by his authority.

One messenger of God is his written word. There can be no question that the Holy Scriptures command men to believe in Christ and confess him without delay. If the Bible is what it claims to be, viz., God's revelation to man, then every one who has ever read the Bible has heard the voice of God, saying, "To-day, harden not your hearts." God also speaks to men in the preaching of the gospel. Sermons differ in their literary merits, and in their methods of presenting the truth, but every gospel sermon exhibits some phase of the plan of salvation, and invites men to accept Christ as their Saviour. Every one who has listened to the preaching of the gospel has heard the command of God; for the message of the preacher is ever summed up in this: "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." God some-

times enforces his commands by the voice of conscience, that inward monitor he has implanted in the soul, to chide when we do wrong and to approve when we do right. Every one has heard its still small voice. The conscience of some may, through a long course of wrong-doing, be seared as with a hot iron, but it was not always so. The man does not live, to whom his conscience has not said: Thou oughtest to do this; and, thou oughtest not to do that. Every conscience, enlightened by the gospel, has warned its possessor as to his duty, and this warning is the voice of God. God speaks to men by the events of his providences. Disappointments, financial disasters, sicknesses and bereavements are all divinely appointed messengers, sent to persuade men to lay up their treasures in heaven. There are few to whose homes and hearts these messengers have not come; and there is no one who will not, some time in the future, receive a visit from one or all of them. Their message is ever the same: "Seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God." God's voice is also heard in the example and admonitions of Christian relatives and friends. It is a sorrowful truth that the life of so many professing Christians is not in harmony with their profession; but every one of us has known some disciple who was manifestly walking with Christ.

It is to be regretted that Christians are so backward in speaking to their unconverted friends about the duties of personal religion; but there are few who have not been exhorted to attend to the interests of their souls. All these are God's messengers, and they come bringing God's message, "To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts."

THIS COMMANDMENT OF GOD IS MADE KNOWN TO YOU BY THESE MANY MESSENGERS.

You have read the Bible; you have listened to the preaching of the gospel; you are not strangers to the reproofs of conscience; you have heard the warnings of Providence; you have been admonished by Christian friends; by all these messengers God has been calling on you to believe in Christ and confess your faith at once. We appeal to all to heed and obey the voice of God. It is not a light thing to treat with indifference the commands of the Most High. Your salvation depends on the response of your souls. But we appeal especially to the children of the church. You have been dedicated to God in the ordinance of baptism; and dare you despise the solemn vows your parents took upon themselves in your behalf? You have been trained in your homes to fear God and keep his commandments; and can you trample this training under

your feet? Your father and mother have prayed for your salvation; their life is bound up in your life; and will you make light of their prayers, their love and their happiness? You have been instructed in the Sabbath school, and have listened week after week to the preaching of the gospel; and will you, by slighting these instructions, heap up for yourselves wrath against the day of wrath? The commandments of God have been made known TO YOU in times and ways without number; and dare you disobey any longer? "If the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" Be persuaded now to believe in Christ, and to confess your faith by a union with the visible church. "The Spirit and the bride say, come. And let him that heareth say, come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." "To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts."

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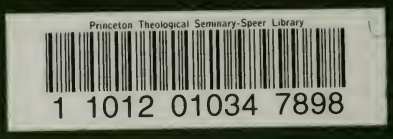
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